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ABSTRACT

Written by teachers and poets, this book offers insights into the nature of poetry and the ways in which children can be taught to enjoy reading and writing poetry. The book contains the following articles: "Poetry and the Magic of Words," by Colin Thiele; "Poetry and the Child," by Charles Causley; "A Verse Along the Way," by Max Fatchen; "The Poet as Mental Mathematician," by Doug MacLeod; "Inside Poetry: A Shared Adventure," by Aidan Chambers; "Poetry and the Pre-School Child: A Personal Reflection," by Clare Scott-Mitchell; "Large Swans Fall off Cliffs: Large Strawberries Don't," by Pat Edwards; "How Not to 'Teach' Poetry," by Moira Robinson; "A Poetry Workshop," by Libby Hathorn; "Teaching Poetry Writing: Part of 'Process'," by R. D. Walshe; "Poetry and Performance 1: Teacher as Performer," by Gordon Winch; "Poetry and Performance 2: Children as Performers," by Sean Monahan; "Poetry Books: An Annotated Guide to Collection-Building," by Walter McVitty; and "75 Things to Do with a Favourite Poem," by Pat Edwards. (EL)

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Word Magic

Poetry as a Shared Adventure

Edited by

Walter McVitty

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Preface

One of the most pleasurable and long-lasting gifts any adult can give to a child is a love of poetry—a love which comes through a joyful sharing of the rich experience which poetry can offer. This new book has been written especially for PETA by a select group of outstanding teachers and celebrated poets from Australia and overseas. It offers insights into the nature of poetry itself and the ways in which we can all help children learn to read and write (and even "perform") poetry with life-long pleasure. It also includes an annotated guide to almost 100 best poetry books.

Word Magic; poetry as a shared adventure is a unique publication. Never before has such a wealth of expert inspiration, information and ideas about poetry been made so accessible to those who work with children. It marks yet another practical and significant contribution by the Primary English Teaching Association to the quality of education in our schools and homes.

COLIN THIELE

Poetry and the Magic of Words

COLIN THIELE is one of Australia's most popular children's authors. He has won many prizes for his work, including the Book of the Year Award in 1982 for *The Valley Between* and, overseas, the Austrian National Children's Book Prize in 1979 for *The Sknuks*. Three of his books, *Storm Boy*, *Blue Fin* and *The Fire in the Stone* have been made into films. Born in Eudunda, in the Barossa region of South Australia, he has spent most of his adult life as a teacher. He was Director of the Murray Park College of Advanced Education and Principal of the Wattle Park Teachers' Centre before retiring in 1980.

It is incredible that a row of black marks on white paper can stir us to anger, shake us with laughter, or cause tears to tremble on our eyelids. Such is the power of written words.

Likewise oral words—spoken, recited, read aloud, or heard silently on the inward ear—can sway our thoughts and our deepest feelings. The sounds and meanings of words, sometimes coalescing in a kind of dazzling fusion, illuminate our lives as nothing else can, showing us reality and dreams so clearly that we gasp. For words, if they are used skilfully enough, can catch the most profound truths and the most tremulous moments of human existence. Nowhere is this more tellingly or more frequently true than in poetry.

As we go about the business of living we are all surrounded by poetic experience—which some people are able to catch and hold in words. In this way it is held frozen for ever, so to speak, no matter how rare and magical it may be. Whole generations can continue to experience and re-experience its vision and vitality, its pleasure and joy. No wonder that many eminent writers believe poetry to be the most perfect form of human expression.

Strangely, there are people who shy away when poetry is mentioned because they think that it is something esoteric, something beyond their ken, something reserved for an elite. Nothing could be further from the truth. Poetry is the

language of human beings, not of gods. We come face to face with the essence of poetry every day in the language of ordinary people, even in the passionate outbursts of the barracker at the football oval.

For poetry, as Ian Reid has pointed out, is a qualitative term rather than merely a term of classification. We see this in phrases such as "the poetry of flight" or "the poetry of motion". We can find poetry in the midst of a passage of prose, and conversely we do not necessarily always find it in something *labelled* a poem or a piece of verse. "Poetry sometimes is less extensive than the poem."

Poetry depends for its effectiveness on the union of sound and sense, word-shape and meaning, association and feeling. The cadence of the human voice, the "music" of sounds in sequence, the arresting freshness of images, the combination of emotion and idea—these give poetry its impact.

For that reason poetry often works obliquely. It is one of the miracles of human expression that by referring to something in terms of something else we see the original more clearly and with deeper understanding. The metaphor somehow achieves what direct description cannot achieve, or achieves less well. It illuminates truths, often with laser-like brightness. It makes us see the simplest things with renewed clarity.

And so D.H. Lawrence sees the flying bat as "an elastic shudder in flight", Ian Mudie's car headlights are "two augers boring into the night", and Kenneth Slessor's panting dogs "lick the sunlight up". In a poet's eye a flowering waratah may be *a chalice of flame*, a hawk's swoop *a golden waterfall*, a car driving down wet streets at night *a huge insect*, "bug-eyed, winged with spray". The breakers on the coast may be *rolling the stars ashore all night*, and schoolchildren may watch the first snowfall rapt in magic, seeing something miraculous beyond understanding—"on their hands the taste of stars". Roy Campbell, looking up at migrating birds in Europe's descending autumn, sees that

Already now the clanging chains
Of geese are harnessed to the moon

and he knows that although the grape harvest is over the results of the vintage are yet to come:

And like a ruby panting fire
The grape will redden on your fingers
Through the lit crystal of the cup.

This same use of image and association, of metaphor and comparison, is part of living speech—the poetry of the people. A garrulous talker can be a *gabbling magpie*, an immoral man can be *so low that he needs a parachute to jump off a snake's back*. Winston Churchill, in old age, is said to have brushed aside a solicitous steward, who kept pointing out that the fly of Churchill's trousers was undone, with the

Poetic trivial pursuit 1

Q: What is an **Alexandrine**?
A: A line of verse having six iambic feet (iambic hexameter); a common line in French poetry

devastating comment, "Dead birds don't fall out of their nests". How overwhelmingly effective such a reply must have been compared with the tedious answer that could have been given.

In his poem "What's that you say?" Ian Mudie uses the expressions of Australian folklore to make up the body of the work: *Who's robbing this coach? . . . My chance and Buckley's . . . He's the bloke who dug the Murray . . . Up at piccaninny daylight . . . Free of sense as a frog is of feathers . . . Flat out like a lizard drinking*, and so on, and then ends each stanza with the refrain:

I hear the people talking poetry
And I know that I should throw my pen away.

It is a powerful way of making his point. The language of the common people does teem with poetic usage. The barracker who implores the umpire to *screw his eyeballs back in*, and the old bushman who likes his brew *so strong that a horseshoe can float or dissolve in it* are all part of that tradition.

Of course when such figurative language is used sloppily, when metaphors are mixed and comparisons are ludicrously inappropriate, the result can be calamitous. Parliamentary debates are usually far from poetic, especially when speakers believe that "the ship of State, anchored firmly to a rock, is sailing forward into calm seas"—a proposition that would give most nautical listeners a heart attack. And a Welsh union leader expressed himself less than felicitously on the eve of a strike when he said: "We have girded up our loins and tied up all our loose ends".

Sometimes the speaker or writer may not even be attempting to use imagery or figurative techniques. Careless use of descriptive words can be equally destructive—to wit, the advertiser who announced that he had a large four-poster bed for sale and added that it was "perfect for an antique lover".

In the same way the demands of rhyme will sometimes seduce the writer into meanings that were never intended, like the lover, cited by Flexmore Hudson, who wrote sadly of the departure of his love: "She has taken all my blue skies and left me a grey behind".

The order of words is critically important in poetry. Take, say, Tennyson's "the murmuring of innumerable bees" which recreates the very sound of the beehive in the line, and consider the effect of even a simple change such as "innumerable bees murmuring". Likewise we may select a couple of lines from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"—

Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide, wide sea . . .

a haunting cry of spiritual desolation and loneliness, of human anguish, if ever there was one, and compare the effect

Viewpoint

It is fashionable to consider the universe a huge game in which all the pieces are illusions. Everything is conditional on everything else and only exists insofar as it can be compared with what it isn't. Language is the most effective way of making sense of such ideas, and poetry, with its multiple meanings and the clarity of its subtlety, is the most complex form of language. Poetry is a game that is too difficult for us, so we play it instinctively. It's time we took to studying the rules with full conscious attention. Instead we mislead children into thinking it's a lot of crap about fairies.

Alan Tucker
Signal, January 1970

Viewpoint

At every reading of a poem, though it may have been familiar from early childhood, some hitherto hidden delicacy of rhythm or intonation may be revealed. Indeed, what is read on the printed page is merely so many words. It is the reader alone who out of them can create a poem, and this poem changes for him as he himself changes with the years.

Walter de la Mare

when we substitute words of similar meaning but without cadence or melody, as suggested by Maxwell and Phillips—

By myself, thy myself, quite, quite by myself,
By myself on an extensive sea.

The heart-rending cry of the mariner has degenerated into cacophony.

The form of a poem can have important influences on the approach of the person who is reading or speaking it. De la Mare's little narrative "Off the ground" is about a dance. It is written in short lines:

Three jolly Farmers
Once bet a pound
Each dance the others would
Off the ground.

The short lines compel us to read it in the rhythm of the dance. Even a child reader will fall into the beat of it within a few lines. Yet how different would have been our reading, and the consequemt tempo of the whole piece, if De la Mare had used long lines while preserving exactly the same words:

Three jolly Farmers once bet a pound
Each dance the others would off the ground . . .

Children enjoy experimentation with different structures of this kind in their own writing, and they like to discuss the ways in which their responses change if a given idea is expressed in different forms. The following is an example. In variation (d) the last word was actually drawn as a mouse in the manner of experimental, concrete or pictorial poetry. Variation (c) was called the "tiptoe" version by the children because "each word has to tiptoe separately through the poem".

(a) *Nothing more noiseless*
in the old house
than silent dustmotes
and a silent mouse.

(b) *Nothing*
more noiseless
in the old house
than
silent dustmotes
and a silent
mouse.

(c) *Nothing*
more
noiseless
in the old house
than
silent
dustmotes
and a silent mouse.

Poetic trivial pursuit 2

Q: What is **Alliteration**?
A: The use of words beginning with the same sound, e.g. *around the rock the ragged rascal ran.*

(d) *Nothing more noiseless*
in the old house
than silent dustmotes
and a silent
~~mouse~~

(e) *Mouse*
is as noiseless
as dustmotes
(in the house).

(f) *Mouse treads as softly as dustmotes (in the house).*

(g) *Mouse's footfalls are softer than falling dustmotes.*

Exercises of this kind can give children a taste for words—the difference, for instance, between *silent* and *noiseless*, the feeling on the tongue of *footfall, falling, softer* and *dustmotes*, the effect of the rhyme with *house* and *mouse*, and the changes that occur when we place words in different patterns, putting them in different lines, or moving them towards or away from one another.

On the other hand such activities can easily become sterile if overdone, especially if the children's attempts are too rigidly controlled by rhyme. If children wish to write their own verse—and they should be encouraged to—they are more likely to achieve flashes of fire within it if they are freed from the constraints of rhyme. Some of the most memorable children's writing I have seen drew its vitality from its freedom of form—like the girl who saw a hare's pricked ears in evening sunlight and was astonished at "*the thin pink skin and all the little veins spread out like a map in there*", and the boy who, having been helped by his father to fly a kite successfully to the point where it was tugging and bucking exuberantly on the string, soared up with it in spirit: "*I was up there too, on the air, with my arms stretched out!*"

Poetic experience of this kind is of enormous importance to children. It not only feeds and extends the imagination but it opens doors to language, and to joy and understanding. It shows that visions and dreams can be caught, that they can reveal the nature of our existence more clearly than reality.

All children should know poetry. At home they should begin their contact with it from the earliest nursery rhymes. At school they should be drenched with it—read by the teacher, read in unison, read individually, sung, listened to on record or tape, written by themselves, shared, put on display, published. A break between lesson periods can be made memorable by the sharing of a much loved poem, or by the reading of a new one by the teacher. I have seen such a reading become a reward at the end of a session, or a celebration when the class has an unexpected "early minute".

Poetic trivial pursuit 3

Q: What is an **Amphibrach**?

A: A metrical foot consisting of a long syllable between two short syllables: *de-DUM-de*. (From the Greek *amphibrachus*: meaning "both ends being short".)

Viewpoint

Imagine what you are writing about. See it and live it. Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it. When you do this the words look after themselves. Like magic. If you do this you do not have to bother about commas or full stops or that sort of thing. You do not look at the words either. You keep your eyes, your ears, your nose, your taste, your touch, your whole being on the thing you are turning into words. The minute you touch, and take your mind off this thing, and begin to look at the words and worry about them . . . then your worry goes into them and they set about killing each other. So you keep going as long as you can, then look back and see what you have written. After a bit of practice, and after telling yourself a few times that you do not care how other people have written about this thing, this is the way you find it, and after telling yourself you are going to use any old word that comes into your head so long as it seems right at the moment of writing it down, you will surprise yourself. You will read back through what you have written and you will get a shock. You will have captured a spirit, a creature.

Ted Hughes
Poetry in the Making (Faber, 1967)

I have seen children overwhelmed with pride and joy at being selected to choose the "day's poem" at the start of the school day or before the recess break—something common to the whole class, known by heart or deeply familiar, shared, revered or laughed over, repeated and loved.

For poetry is one of the richest resources of our language, an ever-renewing example of the magic of words. We must never deprive children of access to it.

CHARLES CAUSLEY

Poetry and the Child

CHARLES CAUSLEY is one of England's finest poets for children or adults. Born in Launceston, Cornwall, in 1917, he was a Primary School teacher for thirty years before becoming a full-time writer. He is especially fond of Australia, having worked here as Writer in Residence at a number of tertiary institutions.

I became what is known as a "children's writer" by accident. As far as I recall, I never set out with the clear intention (or perhaps I should say hope) of writing a "children's" poem in my life. What happened was that somewhere along the way I discovered that—presumably through the work of teachers and through the publication of various of my poems in school and other anthologies—a certain segment of my work had been taken over, as it were, by children. It was, I can't deny, an encouraging experience. And I'll never forget my first encounter with my new public: one morning in my local greengrocer's shop in the Cornish market-town of Launceston where I live.

I was standing in the queue, waiting to be served, when I became conscious of two pairs of electro-magnetic eyes firmly pointing in my direction: from two little girls, quite unknown to me, aged about six and eight. They glanced at each other, and the older of the two approached me. "Excuse me," she said, "But are you the man who makes the poetry?" Note that phrase: the man who *makes* the poetry—as of a table, a pair of shoes, or a suit of clothes. "Yes," I said: and the little girl at once turned to her sister. "It's him," she said, with a kind of grim satisfaction. And joining hands, the pair of them—in the middle of the Saturday shop—cleared their throats and recited one of my poems, in unison.

Thus (and not always so encouragingly) does the writer meet his audience.

The mere task of writing a poem has always been problem enough for me, without complicating the issue by worrying about its possible effect on an always-mythical reader. Only a monster could write a poem with the reader looking over his shoulder, or staring back at him through the bars of lines on the writing-paper. It's a love affair—often a love-hate affair—between the poet and the poem. Thoughts of a third party—the reader—must be banished ruthlessly from the mind, or paralysis of the imagination and of intent are certain to set in. My own method, at all events, is first to try and produce a poem, and to decide afterwards whether it might be published in a literary magazine or journal aimed principally at adults, or whether it might appear in some sort of context more accessible to children as well. At the back of my mind is a point made brilliantly clear by W.H. Auden in the Introduction to his selection of poems by Walter de la Mare, published by Faber in 1953. "It must never be forgotten," he says, "that while there are *some* good poems which are only for adults, because they pre-suppose adult experience in their readers, there are no good poems which are only for children."

What, then, if one writes a poem that turns out to be, all too obviously, only for children? I can speak for myself. I throw it away—particularly if it seems to have come off rather well. Not that I've ever particularly admired anything I've written. I think it very necessary for a writer to bear in mind a piece of advice Dr Samuel Johnson passed on in a letter in 1773: "Read over your compositions", he says, "and where ever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out".

As a writer—indeed, as anyone engaged in the creative arts—one may only aim at the highest standard; anything else doesn't seem to me to be worth doing. The attempt is to produce a poem. This means that it must be a living organism, capable of continuous development and change. It must contain qualities both of revelation and of mystery. It must embody hints and intimations, produce resonances and reverberations, not only from words said, but also, somehow, from what is most carefully left *unsaid*. It should emit what the Spanish poet Frederico Garcia Lorca called *sonidos negros*, "black sounds". And each time the poem is read anew, over days, months, years, and however intimately we may think we know it, it must always remain capable of telling us something new about itself, about ourselves, about the world we live in, and—with luck—maybe of other worlds than this.

Small wonder, then, that poems—or any work of art—aren't usually produced to order. True poetry is that which

Poetic trivial pursuit 4

Q: What is an **Amphimacer**?
A: A metrical foot consisting of a short syllable between two long syllables. *DUM-de-DUM*. (From the Greek word *amphimacrus*, meaning 'both ends being long'.)

must be written. The poet who fails to respond to this impulse does so at his own peril and risks the most gradual and insidious spiritual death. And creativity has its own peculiar and particular disciplines. Poetry is not, for example, a word-game. *Words are put out to work, and not to grass.*

A poem isn't a clock. If it's taken to pieces and put together again, it still may give no reason at all why it ticks—nor is it obliged to. And at the same time we need to remember that no poem has a fixed "meaning", and that what we call "meaning" is likely to differ with each reader as he or she applies individual experience and sensibility to what is said—or what is left, significantly, unsaid.

Just one more point about the poem itself. To use another image, it should not, like a house, be so ill-designed nor crammed with furniture that there is no space for that hopeful tenant, the reader, to occupy it. The organisation of a poem so that this essential "other" area exists within it—this living and breathing space for the imagination within its structure—is, in my view, one of the subtlest and most absorbing problems in art. It is in this way that poetry functions as a two-way relationship, as hazardous as it can be rewarding, between writer and reader.

In the case of poetry and the child, then, I feel that what should be on offer is *poetry*—not poetry and water. Never something that can be grown out of; not something to be discarded at the age of ten, twelve, sixteen , or whatever, as a garment that no longer fits. On the contrary, it should be something that one grows *into*; that can be carried to the grave—and beyond.

This is why, in my years as a teacher, I chose verse to be read to children with very special care. I remembered the words of a wise lecturer the day I left my College of Education. "Don't forget," he said, "to feed the lambs."

It took me, all the same, some time to discover that children are capable of receiving—in poetry—just as much as the adult is venturesome enough to make available. It's certainly true that when I began teaching I seriously underestimated the capacity of (particularly) younger children in this respect. A yound child needs just as much grit and gristle to sustain and purify his imaginative diet as the adult; and I found that patronising rhymes and jingles in which the child is talked down to, rather than straight at, soon cloy, soon wither and die in that sweaty and battle-ridden midden—the average classroom. The finest of writers, alas, are sometimes responsible for the most stomach-turning of literary crimes:

A birdie with a yellow bill
Hopped upon the window sill.
Cocked his shining eye and said:
"Ain't you 'shamed, you sleepy-head?"

Yet it was the same author, Robert Louis Stevenson, in the

Viewpoint

Poetry is "language conscious of itself", to paraphrase James Britton. It is language at play. The game can be serious, of course, and its "rules" constantly vary. But the dance of language in poetry is the dance of humanity. It can go straight to the heart of things. It can console or wound, divert or call to action. Where it takes us, who can say? But we are definitely the poorer if we have not joined in this ancient, ever changing, ever relevant "chain of voices".

Neil Whitfield
Editor of *Neos: Young Writers*

same book (*A Child's Garden of Verses*, first published in 1885) who produced such imperishable masterpieces as "Where go the boats?":

Dark brown is the river
Golden is the sand,
It flows along for ever,
With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating,
Castles of the foam,
Boats of mine a-boating—
Where will all come home?

On goes the river
And out past the mill,
Away down the valley,
Away down the hill.

Away down the river,
A hundred miles or more,
Other little children
Shall bring my boats ashore.

Disarmingly enough, Stevenson wrote of these poems: "These are rhymes, jingles; I don't go in for eternity and the three unities . . . I would just as soon call 'em *Rimes for Children* as anything else, I am not proud nor particular".

I think I detect here, nevertheless, something of the creative artist putting on defensive armour in anticipation of the thuds and blows of literary criticism. I also suggest that the best of these poems were produced by Stevenson when he *forgot* his declared intention of writing them for children. Like most writers working in this field, I suspect he was concerned with the problems of *communication*. There's not much sense, after all, in talking on a closed or dead line. One's language, then, would seem to demand a high degree of *simplicity* and *directness*, as well as the essential quality of *extreme suggestibility*. But the danger lies in the temptation to be over-explicit.

It's not the business of a poem to be wholly accessible at a first reading. To communicate with, establish a relationship, touch the reader: yes. But it must also hold certain qualities in reserve; to live, in fact, to speak or fight afresh another day, and another. A poem has no need to burn itself out in one single, brilliant flash of recognition like a magnesium flare set off by a guide in the black guts of one of the Pyramids of Giza. Poetry, we should never forget, contains the element of magic. I have tried to define it, in another place, as "a spell against insensitivity, ignorance and barbarism". And we must remember the powerful effect of the *sound* of verse written by a great master—particularly on children. Let what we call "understanding" come in its own good time. We have to beware of impatience; the writer's great enemy, as well as

Poetic trivial pursuit 5

Q: What is **Anacrusis**?
A: One or more (unexpected) unstressed syllables at the beginning of a line of verse. (From the Greek word *anakrousis*, "prelude".)

that of the reader. On this subject, Goethe said: "We must be right by nature, so that good thoughts may come before us like free children of God and cry, *Here we are*". Meantime, let's enjoy with Coleridge, and our children . . .

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Long before I even hoped to become a teacher, I came across a remark by the Czech writer Karel Capek that was to rise to the surface like a lifebelt and give me aid and comfort as I struggle to understand something of the children and young people I worked with—literally from nursery-school children of three-and-a-half years to university students. "The young," said Capek, "are a secret society, and the old have forgotten that they once belonged to it."

I believe it the duty of the teacher, the parent, the writer, *to try and remember*. Hopeless, of course, to imagine that one can somehow infiltrate, or re-enter, such a society. But one can at least watch, and pray—especially watch, as a deeply religious friend of mine always says.

And how are we to cultivate, to develop a **taste** for poetry—indeed, for any of the arts—in a child? I've a feeling it's best done by the communication of simple, personal *enthusiasm*—in the Greek sense of being possessed or inspired by the God. It's a fire, if you like, from which others might take warmth and heat and light by attrition. One has to be immensely careful, all the same, not to reduce the child to ashes in a withering and ceaseless fire directed from the armoury of English verse. Poetry, well-chosen, is a powerful material; one really doesn't need much to capture—or at least to breach the gate of—the castle of imagination. But the responsibility of the parent or teacher is a heavy one. Best, in the first place, to leave well alone if, for one reason or another, the enthusiasm on the part of the adult is something assumed, and not genuinely from the heart.

The Russian poet and writer Kornei Chukovsky (one of the greatest authorities this century on children's speech and patterns of behaviour and creative writing powers) in his book *From Two to Five* comments on the kinds of verse to which the children are all too frequently subjected by adults, no doubt with the best of intentions in the world. He writes:

> When the children sing, clap, play, or work out a project, I look on with the greatest pleasure. When they begin to read me poems that have been taught in school . . . I often feel like a real martyr. Together with the work of our classical poets, they have been taught hackneyed lines, absurd rhythms, cheap rhymes. There are times when I could cry with disappointment. I am convinced that exposing children to such trash will cripple their aesthetic tastes, disfigure their literary training, and condition them to a slovenly

Viewpoint

Poetry generally requires effort from the reader. It is harder work to remake a poem in the imagination simply because poetry is the most condensed form of language that we have. By the same token, a child's knowledge of what language is and does will become deeper and more subtle through poetry than through any other form of literature. To deprive children of poems is to deny them the society of clear, single voices and an irreplaceable range of feeling. We neglect poetry at our own peril. We need to know more about what is available and what to do with it.

Michael Benton
Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978, p. 114

Viewpoint

When a poet writes a poem, he [she] is saying something more important than the things said in everyday life.
James Reeves
The Poet's World (Heinemann)

attitude to the written word, and that all this rubbish will block off the children's appreciation of genuine poetic works. However, my author's grief was incomprehensible to some of the educators, as these excellent people (so useful in other ways) had been deprived of literary culture. They had no criteria for evaluating works of poetry.

As I also happen to think that the highest and most fruitful aim of education is no longer merely the cultivation of the intelligence, but, even more important, *the cultivation of the creative imagination*, I can't resist also quoting to you what Chukovsky has to say on that particular subject:

> In almost every kindergarten and every child centre, in every school, I met promising children who, under different circumstances, could be developed into good writers; but their giftedness withered in the non-literary environment in which they found themselves. The "corrections" made in their verses by the teachers were almost invariably worse than the original version.

But what of one who lives out a childhood innocent of poetry? Or is this impossible? I think it is impossible. Fortunately, the world of poetry, like the Kingdom of Heaven, has many mansions. For my own part, I can only say that poetry seems to have been non-existent in my life up to the age of twelve or so. As far as I recall, there was no poetry book in our house. As for my early schooling, all I recall in this field is that Young Lochinvar came out of the west and that through all the wide Border his steed was the best: though I don't recall anyone explaining *why* Lochinvar had come out of the west—or even precisely *where* in the west it was. As we were children in a Cornish school, I had a vague notion that it might have been Penzance.

Then there were those lines by Tennyson:

> *The splendour falls on castle walls*
> *And snowy summits old in story.*

Immediately above our classroom window was the ivy-covered and greenly disintegrating mass of a Norman castle, but I don't recollect any parallel drawn between the fact and the fiction. A mere four lines or so of verse salvaged from seven years in a junior school would seem to indicate that the formal poetry lesson wasn't for me.

Does this mean, then, that I was deprived of poetry as a young child? Not a bit of it. What spoke to me most clearly were the words of the folk-songs and ballads we were taught in the singing class:

> *A ship I have got in the North Country*
> *And she goes by the name of the Golden Vanity;*
> *O I fear she'll be taken by a Spanish Go-la-lee,*
> *As she sails by the Lowlands low.*

These ballads, these songs, were the foundation of my belief that one *almost sure way* of bringing together poetry and the child is through the use of the traditional ballad. Few

Poetic trivial pursuit 6

Q: What is an **Anapest**?
A: A metric foot of three syllables, in rising triple rhythm: *de-de-DUM*. (The Greek original *anapaistos* meant "reversed".) Example:
And the **whis***pering* **sound** *of the* **cool** *colonnade*

children, in this or any age, can be unfamiliar with the age-old pattern of birth, love, marriage, infidelity, betrayal, hate, sickness, old age, death. This pattern is part of the fabric of our most ancient poetry: and marvellously assuring and reassuring and informative it can be, and in an essentially subtle and undidactic manner, on the ways of the world.

And there was English folk-song, drawn from the work of such great collectors as Cecil Sharp:

Jackie boy. Master.
Sing 'ee well. Very well.
Hey down. Ho down,
Derry derry down,
Among the leaves of green O!

Were we aware (as James Reeves has pointed out in his celebrated study *The Idiom of the People*) that "the theme of sexual pursuit symbolised by a hunt is a commonplace in medieval poetry"? Certainly not; and my guess is that our kind teachers weren't aware of it either. But no matter; the seeds of poetry, almost unknowingly, were planted.

Then there was *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. I remember our little parish church of St Thomas-the-Apostle almost giving a lurch every time we sang that alarming verse by my near neighbour, the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould:

Grant to little children
Visions bright of Thee—
Guard the sailors tossing
On the deep blue sea.

And my mother had a great fund of music-hall songs, which I much preferred to conventional lullabies: such songs as "Oh Mr. Porter!" and "I wouldn't leave my little wooden hut for you". My favourite was the melancholy

Why am I always the bridesmaid,
Never the blushing bride?
Ding! Dong! Wedding bells
Always ring for other gels.
But one fine day,
Oh, let it be soon,
I shall wake up in the morning
On my own honeymoon!

The result, unexpectedly, was that when as a boy in my teens I came to read T.S. Eliot's "Morning at the Window"

I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids
Sprouting despondently at area gates . . .

I was able to greet them as old friends, and to approach Eliot's work in a rather more relaxed and confident way than might have been otherwise. Poetry, there was no doubt about it, was something directly concerned with living—and dying. Reading the work of Siegfried Sassoon at about the same time, I recognised for the first time what had really been, for

I Saw a Jolly Hunter

I saw a jolly hunter
With a jolly gun
Walking in the country
In the jolly sun.

In the jolly meadow
Sat a jolly hare.
Saw the jolly hunter.
Took jolly care.

Hunter jolly eager—
Sight of jolly prey.
Forgot gun pointing
Wrong jolly way.

Jolly hunter jolly head
Over heels gone.
Jolly old safety-catch
Not jolly on.

Bang went the jolly gun.
Hunter jolly dead.
Jolly hare got clean away.
Jolly good, I said.

Charles Causley

Viewpoint

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?
Emily Dickinson

a terrible period, the world of my almost unremembered father who had died as a casualty of World War I.

It's twenty years ago now since I was invited by a firm of publishers to edit my first anthology of verse for children. I think I sensed a slight stirring of unease on the part of the publishers when I suggested that it should be composed entirely of work by modern poets. "Is there enough work by modern poets that young children will understand?" I was asked. I assured them that the difficulty would lie not in what to put in, but in what to leave out. To their eternal cred[illegible] raised not a single query more, paid a Fort Kn[illegible] amount in copyright fees, and the result was one of t[illegible] anthologies of modern verse in English (not a school textbook) for children. I hope I may be forgiven for saying that its reception—by critics, by parents and teachers, by the public generally, and above all by children—taught me the importance (whether as an anthologist or as a poet) of trusting one's instincts, *and* of trusting one's reader.

In that early anthology of mine I included several poems by Robert Graves: one of them, called "Vain and Careless":

Lady, lovely lady,
Careless and gay;
Once, when a beggar called,
She gave her child away.

The beggar took the baby,
Wrapped it in a shawl—
"Bring him back," the lady said,
"Next time you call."

The poem ends:

This gentle-born couple
Lived and died apart—
Water will not mix with oil
Nor vain with careless heart.

Nor, in my view, should one try and mix poetry with water. With trepidation, then, I end with a poem of my own which I published in a collection called *Figgie Hobbin*. The contents are described on the jacket as "poems for children", but I'd be unhappy if they turned out to be no more than that. And with luck, perhaps this poem might tell you more about myself, my attitudes to the present and the past, and give some hint of the root-source of all my work as a writer—for adults and for children—than anything I've tried to say to you in the course of this article. The poem is called "Who?"

Who is that child I see wandering, wandering
Down by the side of the quivering stream?
Why does he seem not to hear, though I call to him?
Where does he come from, and what is his name?

Poetic trivial pursuit 7

Q: What is **Assonance**?
A: The use of repeated vowel sounds with different consonant sounds, especially at the ends of lines, e.g. *mine* and *night*; *time* and *light*; *mystery* and *mastery*. (From the Latin *assonare*, to sound.)

Why do I see him at sunrise and sunset
Taking, in old-fashioned clothes, the same track?
Why, when he walks, does he cast not a shadow
Though the sun rises and falls at his back?

Why does the dust lie so thick on the hedgerow
By the great field where the horse pulls the plough?
Why do I see only meadows, where houses
Stand in a line by the riverside now?

Why does he move like a wraith by the water,
Soft as the thistledown by the breeze blown?
When I draw near him so that I may hear him,
Why does he say that his name is my own?

MAX FATCHEN

MAX FATCHEN wrote a column of light verse several times a week for the *Adelaide Advertiser* for 28 years in the course of his work as a senior journalist. He has written eight books for children, including two books of verse, *Songs for My Dog and Other People* (Kestrel/Puffin) and *Wry Rhymes for Troublesome Times* (Kestrel). His children's verse has appeared on Thames and Yorkshire Television and frequently on the BBC. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1980 for his contribution to journalism and literature. He is now full-time writing at his Smithfield home. His wife Jean is a teacher and they have six grandchildren and, of course, one poodle.

Illustrated by Michael Atchison

A Verse Along the Way

I should warn you at the start that this is a personal testimony of a very minor poet.

Poetry is personal. We each react differently to it. Some poetry we like and some we don't. Some we dismiss as old-fashioned and, in the process, often overlook something that echoes its times and makes a powerful contribution to the spirit of humankind.

We began learning poetry in nursery rhymes. We made up jingles ourselves. Some of them were rude and even bawdy. Children can be funny bawds. Some of it expressed our feelings about each other, about teachers, about parents and about life. We scribbled it in the back of exercise books.

Some of it was more serious because some of us were more thoughtful.

Some of us lost the desire to write it and, worse still, to read it.

Some have abandoned it altogether and some have brought it with them, a good companion.

Poetry is still a powerful force with young people: poetry of the environment; poetry of protest; anti-war poetry; and often poetry written for pleasure. All of it is but a continuation of that literary force that has been with us since language was written down and even before that when oral poetry was a way of preserving legend and heroic deeds.

One of the most remarkable poets I've met was an Aboriginal songman on the banks of the Koolatong River in Arnhem Land. I was doing some newspaper stories about the area and we sat together under a still, starry sky while he talked about his poetry, the legends and the songs of why grass grew, how rain fell, why rivers flowed. He painted with simple words and gestures the lifestyle and beliefs of his people and expressed his love for his land. He made an impression on me that will last all my life.

I began writing verse when I attended a small, single-teacher school on the Adelaide Plains in South Australia.

It was an old school with thick walls, small windows and pepper-trees outside. I liked to hear poems from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and Eugene Field's *Wynken, Blynken and Nod*. Strangely, half a century later my verse would be appearing on the editorial pages of a newspaper in Denver, Colorado, in the spot where Field had published his verse.

My verses at school amused the other children but didn't cut much ice with the captain of our cricket team, for I was a dreamy batsman (at number nine!) and usually went second or third ball.

But something I noticed about the countryside, that I had found in verse. The country had its rhythms too. The windmill, spun by the wind, cranked its pump and lifted the water rhythmically. There was even a rhythm in milking cows, the milker squeezing the teats and sending the milk into the bucket with a beat to which you could almost dance.

The chaff-cutter engine in the barn had a slow heavy beat that you could hear a kilometre away.

There was music in the countryside if you listened, the wind through the trees or singing through the flywire screen of the window.

I was an only child and I suppose I took notice of these things. There was a rhythm in the seasons; things came around regularly; crops grew and were harvested.

There was a rushing music in the crops, especially when in full head and flag; they would sweep and sway to the wind's touch and tempo.

There was the rhythm of the raindrops, beating sometimes with a muted touch or hammering like drum-sticks on our hot iron roof.

My Primary School teacher encouraged my writing. She'd stop and chat after school. She introduced me to ballads which I liked. People now might laugh at Longfellow's "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*" but when she recited it tears came into my eyes at the picture of the frozen form of the captain's little daughter lashed to the mast. It was all as real as if the sea was actually beating at our schoolroom door.

There were of course C.J. Dennis and Banjo Paterson, with

Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been,
Licking your lips with your whiskers so clean?
Pussycat, pussycat, purring and pudgy,
Pussycat, pussycat, WHERE IS OUR BUDGIE?

Max Fatchen

Poetic trivial pursuit 8

Q: What are **Ballads**?

A: Ballads are narrative poems in short stanzas, of popular origin, originally sung to a repeated tune. Ballads make excellent introductions to poetry for children.

COUNTRY LUNCH

The basket is a big one, the billycan immense.
We carry them so carefully when getting through the fence.
The wind is full of hay smell and hawks patrol the sky.
When we take the lunches out,
Jeremy and I.

The harvester is whirring, it cuts the heads of wheat,
The dusty whirlwinds spiralling in columns through the heat.
There could be summer snakes about, or so our mother said.
That's why we're walking warily
And watching where we tread.

We've seen the paddock growing, for magical the rain,
With each stalk putting out its flags and nourishing its grain.
We've seen old farmers shaking heads because the season's dry;
And we have been a part of it,
Jeremy and I.

For country folks are worriers and though it's not a crime,
Yet parents seem (says Jeremy) to do it all the time . . .
The bills, the taxes and the kids and how the dams are low
And so it sets us wondering
Why people worry so.

But then it happens. Storms arrive and creeks go mad and flood
And there is gold in every drop and diamonds in the mud.
The neighbours call to celebrate, with sausage-rolls and tea
And everything comes right again
For Jeremy and me.

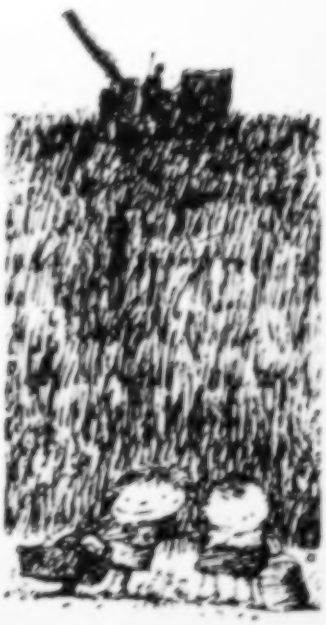
So now we take the lunches out. It's "Hurry up, you kids",
Undoing of the luncheon wraps and rattling billy-lids.
With half a dozen messages. You'll need to understand.
It's hurry, hurry, hurry,
With people on the land.

The grain trucks for the silo, the agent for the sheep,
"Now you remember, Jeremy. Your brain is half-asleep,
We'll get another drum of fuel. It won't do any harm."
It's orders, orders, orders
When living on a farm.

"The steak and kidney pie is nice. Your mother's quite a cook."
Our father's eyes are wandering with that slow farmer's look
That touches crop and heat-hazed land and plainly it will tell
He cares for me and Jeremy
And loves his earth as well.

We help him with the pannikins and clean the crusty plate.
The crop is ripe for harvesting. Tonight he's working late.
The summer's full of wonder (and steak and kidney pie)
When we take the lunch things home
Jeremy and I.

Max Fatchen



"Mulga Bill's Bicycle" and "The Man from Ironbark" and much more.

Years later I wrote a piece about Paterson but put two "t's" in the great man's name. It was discovered at the last moment by a literary sub-editor and the offending "t" chipped out of the leaden cylinder already fastened to the printing press. Head bowed, I listened to the tirade of the sub-editor: "You have shamed the name of our greatest balladist. You are a disgrace to literature and to accuracy." I would gladly have flung myself aboard the doomed *Hesperus* or ridden away into the Never Never on Mulga Bill's bicycle if I'd had the chance.

At High School, more caring teachers gave me a deeper insight into poets and poetry. They fought a battle with my father, who wanted me to be a farmer. Yet when we went on camping holidays with other farmers and their sons, and we all sat around the fire at night at our beachside camp, he didn't seem to mind the daily saga I always wrote. So I decided to become a *jongleur*, a sort of minstrel. And so it eventually transpired.

I have written topical light verse for the *Adelaide Advertiser* for 30 years and it has been reprinted in all kinds of odd places, from Denver, U.S.A. to Dawlish, U.K. When the Fire Brigade of Dawlish, in South Devon, departed for a fire but forgot to open the fire station doors first, I wrote a verse about it. Ten days later it was in the Dawlish paper and I made a vow never to catch on fire in Dawlish, for I knew the Fire Brigade, swearing vengeance, was waiting for me.

When a Viking's sock was found in the River Ouse near York, I wrote another topical verse about it. Within a few days it was in the *Yorkshire Evening News* and the *Dalesman*, in the "All Creatures Great and Small" country. You never know where verse will finish or how fast it will travel. Vera Lynn's husband wrote about one of my verses; so did an old riverman in New York State. Not because I was a great poet but because I was a *jongleur* and people like events to be put into rhyme sometimes; and funny rhymes can help you keep your reason, just as serious poetry can probe your soul.

Along the way I remember the teachers and others who have cared about a modest talent and an often lonely boy. There have been people who've picked me up when I stumbled and headed me in the right direction when I've lost my way.

Poetry and verse have become part of my life. I read poetry assiduously, day in and day out. I take it with me on the train to read just one poem before work. I take it at night like aspirin.

I try to read across the range of poets, not only of our own time but also of other times. For poetry, like a coral reef, is built by the contributions of generations and centuries.

Viewpoint

Poetry can be enjoyed at many levels. It is capable of giving such pleasure in infancy as to create a lifelong appetite for it, a feeling and a love. This pleasure is not mere titillating of the ear or imagination for a few years only, but one which continues to delight and instruct. Poetry widens the intellectual as well as the imaginative boundaries of living and adds to the stock of ideas.

Leonard Clark

Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978, p. 131

Poetic trivial pursuit 9

Q: What is **Ballad Metre**?

A: A four-line stanza, in ballad metre usually with a b c b rhyme.

A SHORT, SUMMERY THIN, THONG SONG

The song
of a
thong
is a
flip,
flap,
flong
that echoes
wherever
you go.
There aren't
any places
for silly
old faces
but a thing
that holds
on to
your toe.

You're flapping
and lapping
with feet
overlapping
and people who watch
will agree
that the song
of a thong
when you're
flapping along
is of feet
that are born
to be
free.

Max Fatchen

I turned to children's verse because I enjoyed children's company and the children I knew were always asking me to read bits of poetry or else they made up their own and recited it to me. They liked rhythm and they liked rhyme. They were capable of understanding compassion as well as joining in fun; their quick ear could pick up the music of words.

One evening I took my poodle for a run and noticed the way she explored each stone and each stick and flung me thoughtful glances as I towered above her, obviously wishing I could get down on my hands and knees and enjoy it all with her. So I wrote "Night Walk", the first poem in *Songs for My Dog*. From it grew poems about hair and about childhood; about bother with adults. There were nursery rhymes with a twist (I was rebuked by one English reviewer for daring to tamper with them); poems about porpoises and Aunt Louisa lighting the gas and vanishing though the ceiling. I tried them on children, who seemed to like them—although dogs were more non-committal.

Later followed *Wry Rhymes for Troublesome Times*, my trying to look at parents with children's eyes, to take their side when they were ignored (another English reviewer thought I was being a dangerous influence). I suppose the child locked up inside of me found some freedom again and kicked up its heels and thumbed a nose. But it built me a bridge to children which we've been crossing and re-crossing. I've enjoyed watching children making their own verses dance and glow, and even when the words stumble and the rhymes are lame there is an intent, a feeling, a desire to participate. I respect children and I long to entertain them and sometimes even to move them.

I believe poetry is as much a part of life as breathing and eating. I think that it should be taught with dedication, enjoyment and participation. To say that it broadens our minds might seem trite, but it does indeed deepen our understanding and, even when it's frivolous, Hamlet lurks not far beyond the clown.

Certainly I don't believe all poetry should be happy or avoid the issues. The very nature of poetry is that it is an expression of the human condition. If it can make us laugh it can also make us feel. If it can present imagery it also can present truths.

So take a poem a day and share it around. You have the world of literature from which to choose. Happy reading and teaching.

And sail on, Schooner *Hesperus* upon your wintry seas—and keep bicycling, *Mulga Bill*.

DOUG MACLEOD

DOUG MACLEOD, one of Australia's most popular young poets for children, began writing verse while at school, and had his first book of poetry published when he was only sixteen. He is also a talented artist and entertainer. His best known books are *In the Garden of Bad Things* and *The Fed Up Family Album* (Kestrel Puffin).

The Poet as Mental Mathematician

Thank you for laying the carpet, Dad,
Thank you for showing us how,
But what is that lump in the middle, Dad?
And why is it saying mia-ow?

I write the way I write because I am a mental mathematician, not really a poet. Moreover, I do not write specifically for children. I write to please myself. Anything which I find embarrassing, weak or corny but which I know children will like is out of bounds as far as I am concerned.

I'm glad my work is used in the classroom, as I write it to be read out loud—placing heavy emphasis on accordian-pleat-style rhythm, alliteration, onomatopoeia and other forms of wordplay. However, I feel a problem arises when the teacher holds up my verse to children as model. "See if you can write something like this" is a rather damaging thing for teachers to say. Neither they nor the children realise these verses take me ages to write, and that I have been working on refining my style since Primary School:

Granny fell into the knitting machine
(I beg you not to laugh).

She first went red and then went green
So now she's a rugby scarf.

When children try to mimic tightly constructed verse, the result is often dull. As co-editor of *Puffinalia*, the magazine of the Australian Puffin Club, I've seen this sort of work over and over again. Pieces entitled "Winter" almost without exception rhyme *day* with *grey* and *rain* with *window pane*. Not only do the four seasons receive ample coverage but the spectrum is also horribly well represented. There are only so many times you can read a poem about *Red* before actually seeing red. The number of times I'm reminded that *Blue* is the colour of the sky makes me wish that overuse of pressure-packs will liberate us all by destroying the ozone layer for good. At least the colours will be more interesting.

As a comic diversion my verse is, I hope, successful. However, I don't believe it should be held up to children as an example after which to aspire. A child's first attempt at strictly metred verse is likely to be so disappointing as to prohibit a second.

I draw a distinction between poetry and verse. **Verse** is the mathematical, tortile word jugglery in which Lewis Carroll specialised and which I aim to create. **Poetry** is the more relaxed and economical stringing together of words, where rigid rhyme and rhythm are *not* the main concern. Rather the aim is to create a mood or the bones of a story. Given this distinction (and not everyone would agree with this), poetry is what we should encourage children, or any literary beginners, to write. And if it sounds abstruse and unengaging, the poetry of Michael Rosen, Roger McGough or Shel Silverstein should settle those fears.

Children should experiment with rhymes and rhythm only when they have discovered that these are *not* the essentials of poetry. Their pieces can combine both blank and rhyming verse, as Roger McGough does in his poem "Uncle Milo":

On his back
he had tattooed
a recipe for stoat and mushroom pie.
*Nobody knew why.**

* "Uncle Milo" is from Roger McGough's *Sporting Relations* (Methuen), recommended mainly for teachers.

One of the best poems by a child which I have ever read is this one, inspired by Roger McGough's "Uncle Milo" poem. It was written by Hendrik Schroer, a Grade Four boy at Geelong Grammar School, who shook off the shackles of rhyme and rhythm to produce this highly comic effort, called "Frankie":

I have a friend called Rewi
who had a sister called Frankie
She was very peculiar indeed
She had no hair or teeth
a very funny look indeed

Poetic trivial pursuit 10

Q: What is a **Ballade**?
A: A French verse form consisting of three stanzas and an envoy, all ending with the same line.

She loved getting letterboxes
and throwing them in car windows
and pulling people's noses
I don't know why
She would catch birds
and put them in a sausage mincer
I don't know why
but I like Rewi's sister.

I don't mean to give the impression that good verse-writing is beyond the grasp of the primary school child. Of course it isn't—but it's not a talent which comes quickly. I suppose I am lucky that I started early. My first dreadful attempts at verse (embarrassingly presented to me last Christmas by a well-meaning grandmother who kept every "season" poem and "colour" poem I ever wrote) were in Grade Three. But before that I had produced works of blank verse—tongue-twisters and "list" poems. If I'd started on rhyming verse and felt intimidated by its difficulty (which I'm sure I would have been) I might never have bothered to try again. I'd be something more sensible today. Like a pharmacist.

So how should my verse be used in the classroom? As a joke in rhyme. A scorpion-tailed piece to perform at the end of the lesson. Not that I want to sell myself short—writing those jokes takes vast amounts of time, energy and a fair whack of brain cells:

See the famous five
hunting on the moor
one finds the murderer
Good work, famous four!

Viewpoint

The search for what is real has led many a poet and his readers to topics once thought of as unpoetic: traffic lights, for example, and escalators, subways and littered sidewalks. On crowded streets and in cluttered hallways man's inhumanity to man shows up dramatically. Adults who have equated poetry with "a host of golden daffodils" may find it difficult to accept this harsh reality for children. Yet this is the children's world, too.

It should not surprise us, then, to find that today's children seek the realistic poetry of bolder voices, speaking in a blunt conversational style. They like poems which debunk the phony and unveil hypocrisy. I think this is one of the reasons why they are held by Eve Merriam's *The Inner City Mother Goose*, which is a biting commentary on the injustices of the American ghetto.

"This is real," explained one fourteen-year-old. "The trouble with poetry at school is it's all covered over with the beautiful."

Nancy Larrick
Somebody Turned on a Tap in These Kids. Delacorte Press, New York, 1971, pp. 4-5.

AIDAN CHAMBERS

AIDAN CHAMBERS is a prominent English author, editor, critic and teacher who, with his wife Nancy (publisher of *Signal*), is a recipient of the Eleanor Farjeon Medal for services to children's literature. He has visited Australia as guest speaker at the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) conferences in Sydney (1983) and Perth (1985). His most recent work is *Booktalk*, a collection of lectures and essays on children and literature.

Inside Poetry

"The pleasure and stimulus [of poetry consists] of a shared adventure, teacher and pupils moving together, alert and hesitant, through the poem's thicket."

John Wain

"A shared adventure"—that's the key. What bedevils poetry for the young is that so many adults insist on reading verse and teaching it as though it were just photographs-in-words: a representational medium for telling us about what they would call reality—the "out there" externals of our lives. Sometimes verse is, of course, such a medium. But poetry is always more than that. It is a Fiction. A world made by the writer in words.

A poem uses reference points drawn from the external world, of course; it may set our minds thinking about the natural world around us. But essentially these reference points are there to help us go inward—into the poem as an object itself. Not an object just in the sense of paper and ink we can look at, but the object which has existence only in our imaginations: the object which is the virtuality of the text—the being made in our minds by the writer's way with language. This is not something we can hold and look at and show other people; it exists within us and shifts and changes

in shape, pattern and meaning—in its gestalt—every time we read the writing through which the poet speaks to us.

Poetry isn't simply a semantic affair, either; it isn't just a matter of words with dictionary meanings. It is made of much more: a complex architecture of semantic and non-semantic effects, which convert everyday, externally recognisable material into something greater, rather as stone and metal and wood are converted by architecture into Durham Cathedral, the great mosque at Mecca, or the Daibutsu at Kamakura—all different yet all religious statements expressive of multiple and profound meanings. There is a philosophy, a way of thinking, behind the architecture, which gives the buildings a meaning extending beyond anything contained within the material they are built of. The buildings mean more in themselves than they represent or are made of. And we can know this, not only by hearing someone tell us what they mean, but by walking inside and round them and experiencing them. Which means using head, heart, and senses. We can do just the same with poetry.

Children need to be given this idea about poetry (about all literature, actually, but about poetry most of all) as early as possible. Strangely enough, nursery rhymes start to communicate it; and nonsense verse adds another layer by playing about with the possibilities created when conventional rules of langauge are broken (which is why children laugh at it). But between these two forms and the major work of the poetic heritage lies a puddingy morass of specially composed verse for children which diminishes the idea of poetry into a sort of corrupt telegram: messages couched in rhyme and rumpety-rump rhythm from which has been drained all the challenge of poetic artifice. Children like such stuff for the same reasons that they like candy floss; and if they are never faced with anything else, the real meat of poetry, they grow up with rotten teeth and no stomach for anything that needs chewing.

Poetry is not easy; it is often hard work. But playing an energetic game of football or digging the garden or having an enthusiastic holiday are all hard work, too. Anything worth doing is usually hard work. Some people complain about the difficulty of poetry when what they really mean is that they don't like it. I don't like football, so the hard work it takes appals me, and I don't play. And I don't like it because I don't think it matters; for me football totally lacks significance. The same is true for people who talk of the difficulty of poetry; they don't like it because they don't believe it is important. Alternatively (and I think this may be the most common reaction), the real trouble is that most people are afraid that anything they say about a poem might be wrong, that poems are for experts.

Somehow what D.H. Lawrence once called "our accursed

Poetic trivial pursuit 11

Q: What is **Blank Verse**?
A: Unrhymed verse, especially in iambic pentameters

education" all too rarely teaches that we should do with a poem exactly what we do with anything else that interests us: involve ourselves in it, then think about what happened. In other words, read the stuff, engage in the adventure; then, with alert hesitancy replay the event and contemplate it. We'll find all the clues we need by which to begin a pleasurable exploration of what the poet has to say.

Let me snatch a glimpse at the first part of Ted Hughes' twenty-one-line poem from *Moon-Bells* (Chatto and Windus) to show what I mean. The poem is "I See a Bear".

> *I see a bear*
> *Growing out of a bulb in wet soil licks its black tip*
> *With a pink tongue its little eyes*
> *Open and see a present an enormous bulging mystery package*
> *Over which it walks sniffing at seams*
> *Digging at the wrapping overjoyed holding the joy off sniffing and scratching*
> *Teasing itself with scrapings and lickings and the thought of it*
> *And little sips of the ecstacy of it*

If we think poetry is about telegram messages or photographs, what we will do with these lines is take a cue from the title and suppose they are meant as a description of the poet's encounter with a grizzly bear. But immediately we find ourselves in trouble: "Growing out of a bulb"? How can that be fitted into a naturalistic description?

It isn't the poem's fault if we do this; it is our own. (One of the great values of poetry, incidentally, is that it forces us to free our minds to think differently and flexibly; it subverts the narrow conditioning that asks us to think in routine fashion. We are fools if we pass up that opportunity.) Ask, What happened to me as I read these lines? and I can only tell you what happened to me. I noticed at once the lack of grammatically directional punctuation. (In other words, I walked into the cathedral and saw that it didn't have carpets on the floor, cosy armchairs, and occasional tables with cheese bits on them. I'm not being invited to a social evening, then.) This non-semantic device tells me to seek a different sort of language play. I notice also that each line is given a capital letter. Taken along with the absence of punctuation, this says to me: Trust the lines as individual units. Don't try to "naturalise them"—make them familiar—by forcing them into sentences.

Poetic trivial pursuit 12

Q: What is **Cadence**?
A: Rhythmical flow and phrasing in language. (From Old Italian *cadenza*, a falling.)

What I'm being given, then, is a pattern that builds on a sequence of images. Immediately, that makes sense of the lines within themselves. "With a pink tongue its little eyes" doesn't make sense if you try to sort it out with the line above and below in a semantically conventional way. On its own,

and felt rather than intellectually determined, it gives me a mental image, vivid and sensual in quality: Eyes and tongues are about seeing and tasting. So the connections, line by line, must be made as sensed images.

Let them work that way, and what you get is a sensation of *bearishness* as Hughes wants us to know it. But this is not a bear-in-the-world; it is a poem. If you let the poem live in you and do not try to build a photographic representation of a bear in your mind, you end the poem feeling strongly the sensational pleasure of receiving some unusual gift. The second part of the poem begins:

> *O bear do not open your package*
> *Sit on your backside and sunburn your belly.*

Open an idea for inspection and it often disintegrates. Most religious activity is about the attempt to recapture the gift of conversion—the not necessarily dramatic moment when the whole universe seems suddenly to make sense. The great moment for any artist is the moment of conception, when the idea of the poem, the story, the picture, or the music is all there, complete and finished. But set to work to get it all down, and you find yourself struggling with bits and pieces that no longer make coherent sense. For one moment, as Hughes' poem says in the last line, "You have got it everything for nothing". So, you can sit in the sun and warm your belly and smirk at "[t]he deer with its pop-eyed incredulity/The weasel pop-eyed with envy and trickery", but you have it only for that day and while the package remains unopened.

The tactile sensations of the experience are strong in the poem not mostly through words but through another architectural element: the combination of letter sounds in the chosen words. The second line picks up round vowel sounds and frames them in hardening consonants that give them firmness: "growing" with *gr* and *ow*; "out of a bulb" with *ou*, *ul*, and the *t* and *b*. "[W]et soil licks its black tip" is laden: the *s*, *l*, and *w* set with *t*, *b*, *p*, and *ck*.

This isn't so much picture-making as triggering off in the reader a sense of touch. Even the word *bear* now seems to carry ambivalent fleshy undertones—the bear of animal-being and the bare of nakedness. Animal nakedness, a revelling in uninhibited sensational life. Once that track is found through the poem, we can sort out deeper layers more easily. And this isn't done by puzzling away at the meaning but simply by attending to the poem-as-object, the poem as a made thing full of clues to its significance and its maker's desires for me, the reader.

Of course, that's my understanding at this time. Another reading, more contemplation of event-in-me and architecture-in-the-poem, and I'll have more to say, more understandings

Poetic trivial pursuit 13

Q: What is a **Caesura**?
A: A thought-pause, usually near the middle of a line of verse. (From the Latin *caedere*, to cut.)
Example:
The wind was a torrent of darkness
among the gusty trees,
The moon was a ghostly galleon
tossed upon cloudy seas
The road was a ribbon of moonlight
over the purple moor . . .

Viewpoint

Poetry is the crystallisation of a concept, so that every facet of that concept may be seen. It can be grasped, if only partially, at one concentrated reading. Its true appreciation transcends mundane explanation; it is an emotional experience as much as an intellectual one, but both are there.
Griselda Greaves
Signal, September 1979

This article first appeared in *Horn Book Magazine* (June, 1979) as part of the author's regular "Letter from England".

to enjoy, which is why poems are not for one reading but for many. And then hard work becomes pleasure.

None of this, it seems to me, lies beyond the range of a child of nine or ten. The poem's words are not difficult in the dictionary sense. The line-by-line images aren't difficult either. And once children have cottoned on to the idea that this is about a certain state of happiness rather than about finding a message to do with a bear in an externalised sense, there is nothing hard about it. All we need to offer the young is poetry of enough quality and some clues about architecture—about things to look for in the way poems are made. And then, we must teach them to trust their own instincts and senses, while at the same time quieting our narrowly trained minds.

In the sense that we usually mean it, poetry is only difficult because we make it so. What poets like Ted Hughes challenge us to do is put ourselves in their poems' hands and give them time to do their work. That's all. We're back at the old, old rules: Literature needs time—time to read, time to think. And therefore it demands first a belief in its worth. Otherwise, quite rightly, it keeps its treasures locked up safe and tight.

CLARE SCOTT-MITCHELL

Poetry and the Pre-School Child

A personal reflection

CLARE SCOTT-MITCHELL (seen here with Dominic, the subject of her article) lectures in Children's Literature at the Institute of Early Childhood Studies, Sydney, C.A.E. She is the compiler of the anthology *When a Goose Meets a Moose* (Methuen).

When I was invited to write this article I knew it would have to be a personal account of one particular child's introduction to poetry—a mini case-study I suppose—because although I am sure that poetry is a most important part of a child's literary heritage, it becomes more apparent when theory can be shown to be supported by empirical evidence. The anecdotes which follow are selective, since I do not intend to write a thesis.

When a new baby is born the family and friends are eager to establish communication. We want to evoke a response. We use our senses to make a connection. We touch with our fingers, with our lips; we touch with our eyes and our voices and we rock with our arms. We want to communicate warmth, welcome, love.

Like most children, Dominic grew used to the many voices of his family. He was used to his mother rocking him in time with her singing. He heard his father's bass voice, talking, singing, responding to his own gurgling and babbling. He

Viewpoint

When we have a particularly valuable or exciting experience, or an unusually strong emotion, we feel a desire to tell people about it, to share it with others. A child says "Look!" whenever anything pleases it. A poem is often nothing more than a more elaborate and interesting form of the child's exclamation.

James Reeves
The Poet's World (Heinemann)

learned to recognise the voices of his grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends—with their own unique speech patterns, differing rhythms and dynamics, all of which offered him a rich pastiche of sound.

By the time he was four months old he already "knew" many rhymes and songs. Certainly he could not yet reproduce them *in toto*, but he had learned to wait for the climax, to anticipate the ending, to move his body in time with the rhythm, to listen attentively and to echo with his own voice. Rituals between adults and child had already been established. One of these was a nappy-changing routine when I minded him on Mondays. When his nappy was off and his legs were free to kick unrestricted, I sang:

Sally-go-round the sun,
Sally-go-round the moon,
Sally-go-round the chimney pots
Every afternoon—**bump!**

When we got to the "bump", I used to come down on his tummy and "blow a raspberry". He soon learned to prepare for this climax. His eyelids began to flutter and he got ready to laugh.

Rituals such as these are invaluable for children. We adults seem to invent them naturally—perhaps they spring from some submerged memory of our own infancy. Wherever they come from, they give children a patterned experience of language and music—which is the beginning of poetry. They develop an ear for the way language works and they do all this to the accompaniment of laughter.

Dominic's extraordinary ability to concentrate on patterns of sound, to practise vocal feats, to wrestle with sound production (even to echo rhythmic patterns which his mother gave him by kicking against the foot of the basket) made me re-think my previous assumptions about language and music development in children. I had forgotten that it emerged so early in a child's life. (This led me to work with Richard Gill and Roderick Bowie, on two L.P. records for young children, using texts from traditional nursery rhymes. I was determined that other babies would have something worthwhile and challenging to listen to. So *Three Bags Full* and *Have You Any Wool* were conceived.)

Nursery rhymes are richly satisfying; the beautiful language, absurd situations, rollicking rhythms, words with mysterious sounds (but no denotative meaning) were to haunt me and in turn become familiar to the child. We would walk round the bedroom looking at Brian Wildsmith's pictures on the walls while I whispered the lines *Ickle, ockle, blue bockle*; we said *Rub-a-dub-dub* and *Pat-a-cake*, the child learning gradually to join in. The range of literary elements gradually being experienced through nursery rhymes is very comprehensive—alliteration, assonance, consonance, personification

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Q: What is a **Cinquain**?
A: A stanza of five lines

and the vast number of differing rhythms which attune the child's ear to the patterns of English poetry. Shakespeare's *Double double, toil and trouble*, rubbed shoulders with the traditional *Hinx, minx, the old witch winks*. There was no time in the child's life when he has not been exposed to the language of poetry. Rhymes like *Fee, fie, foe, fum* were familiar as "sounds" long before the hyperbole of the situation was enjoyed within the context of the tale. I do not think that we can over-estimate the richness of the material at our disposal in the English language.

The key to experiences in childhood lies to a very large degree with adults—who either bring these rich language experiences to children, or use language simply as a tool for moving children around: "Sit down"; "Be quiet"; "Be seen and not heard"; "Go to bed"; "Eat your dinner"; "Go back to your seat and get on with your work".

A.D. Hope has said that "A word is not an object, it is an activity; it expresses thought and feeling, or it arouses thought and feeling".* **For babies, feeling possibly comes before thought.**

When this child was eleven months old, and we were on holidays in the country, I took him out one night when the moon was full—out on top of a hill. Night noises were erupting all around us, crickets chirped in the grass; the wide-eyed baby held on tightly as we looked at the moon. It was "ight" for him (all lights were special to him). As we stood out there I quietly repeated one of my favourite poems, Walter de la Mare's "Silver":

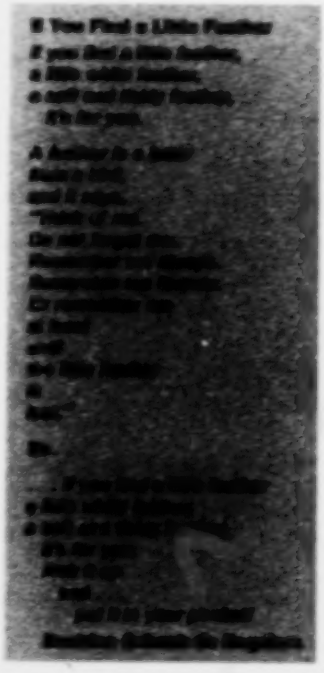
> *Slowly, silently, now the moon*
> *Walks the night in her silver shoon;*
> *This way, and that, she peers and sees*
> *Silver fruit upon silver trees . . .*

The words of course were not comprehended but the feelings experienced out there—the magic of the night sky, the warmth of an Australian December evening, the richness of the sensations—were immeasurably enriched by de la Mare's language.

Poetry was now becoming a normal accompaniment to everyday experiences. By 17 months he had *Three Bags Full* as a daily diet as well as adults around with a wealth of verse to call on. Rituals now were originating from the child himself. When he heard *Ride-a-cock-horse* he got onto a wooden horse. When he heard *Tick-tock says my father's big clock*, he always looked for a clock—and so on. Now *meaning* of the rhymes became as important as the patterns and sounds of the words. A snail became a trigger for a poem about a snail; a feather always meant de Regnier's poem "If you find a little feather".

One afternoon when he was three we went outside and felt the rain on our faces. I repeated Langston Hughes' poem,

* A.D. Hope *The New Cratylus, notes on the craft of poetry*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 18.



April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you.
Let the rain beat upon your head
with silver liquid drops.
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.

The rain makes still pools on the
sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in the
gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep-song on
our roof at night—

And I love the rain.

Langston Hughes

"April Rain Song". When his parents arrived they had to let the rain "kiss" them, in turn. Six months later I was wakened by the four-year-old child one morning at the beach. "Wake up Clare, it's raining". Getting little response, he whispered in my ear words that woke me up indeed: "*Let the rain kiss you*". I said "What else does the poet say?" Then the rest of the poem followed: "*Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops/Let the rain sing you a lullaby . . .*" It was not until that morning, through the voice of a four-year-old, that I realised what Langston Hughes had achieved rhythmically with that poem. It sounds exactly like the intermittent rhythm of rain on a roof.

So poetry works mysteriously when we make it available to children through first hand experience. The language itself becomes an instrument of perception—"it arouses thought and feeling"—but equally it can bring shape, form and significance to our raw experience of the world.

Four years after the night on the hill at Bellingen, Dominic and I were sitting on the upstairs verandah of our house, watching another full moon. It was another summer evening, the harbour rippled in the moonlight, fruit bats flew between the Morton Bay fig trees. We sat silently for a while, then he began to quote James Stephens' poem, "The White Window":

The moon comes every night to peep
Through the windows where I lie,
And I pretend to be asleep;
But I watch the moon as it goes by,
And it never makes a sound . . .

Then I recited de la Mare's "Silver". We quoted poems back and forth for a while, and then he said, "I want to write a poem now", so he dictated and I wrote the following:

Bats fly
High
In the sky.

They fly
Over houses
But not
Over the moon.

Now the thing has come full circle—**from child as listener and receiver, to child as poet.** No one had forced Dominic to write. Poetry is as natural to him as any other kind of language. What he has learned is that it *is* acceptable. It is not foolish or "sissy" to share poetry with people you trust. He has learned that language can be shaped; poems have form, they can rhyme; you don't have to explain them; they exist in their own right and they are made by people; they are a useful way to "hold" an experience or an emotion.

Poetic trivial pursuit 15

Q: What is **Common Measure**?

A: Resembles ballad metre, consisting of four iambic lines rhyming *a b c b* or *a b a b*, often used in hymns.

This morning this seven-year-old (as he is now) said to me, "My teacher was very sensible. She asked us a very interesting question. She said, 'What do you think the poet (Langston Hughes) was writing about when he write "Poem"?' I think he could have been writing about a person, but it could have been a dog or a cat, couldn't it?" I wonder how much this teacher knows about Dominic's early experiences with poetry? Probably not much, but she is endorsing what he already knows—that poetry is a most valuable means of experience. Now it has become a vehicle for contemplation and for reflection. It is also a vehicle for riddles, jokes and all manner of play with words—but it is already more than that for him. It is a way of life, a habit and source of pleasure. It is a means of discovering patterns, not only in language but also in life itself.

It has often been said that poetry and children have a natural affinity. Both poets and children experiment with language, with vigour and freshness. Obviously the children who enter pre-school and school will have widely differing experiences with poetry, since to a large degree adults hold the key to these experiences. Parents and teachers with a love of words, who are themselves open to the delights of language, will share poetry naturally and their enthusiasm will be contagious.

Pre-school teachers are using nursery rhymes and verse more than they once did, I think, and I have seen some infants' schools where the enjoyment of poetry is flourishing. In one, a poetry corner has been erected in the shape of a tree. Chicken wire is used for a trunk; the "leaves" have poems written on them—chosen by both teacher and children. A table is provided for anthologies, which are in constant use by the children. The children are writing their own poems, which are both on the tree and in home-made anthologies. On some days poems are shared about specific subjects like *cats, jokes, wind* or *witches*. The children talk about the many different ways to write about the same subject. This serves not only to foster language but also to endorse the value of individual viewpoint and experience. At the same time it provides insight into shared experience and our common humanity.

Viewpoint

I know that a great many children did, and do, like *When We Were Very Young*. I think that such merit as attaches to the verses was won by taking pains: more pains, perhaps, than is usual. Whatever else they lack, the verses are technically good. The practice of no form of writing demands such a height of technical perfection as the writing of light verse. *When We Were Very Young* is not the work of a poet becoming playful, nor of a lover of children expressing his love, nor of a prose-writer knocking together a few jingles for the little ones. It is the work of a light-verse writer taking his job seriously even though he is taking it into the nursery. It seems that the nursery, more than any other room in the house, likes to be approached seriously.

A. A. Milne

Autobiography. Dutton, New York, 1939, p. 282

PAT EDWARDS

PAT EDWARDS, a former P.E.T.A. President, is a primary trained teacher who specialised in Art. She also holds a Diploma in Speech and Drama and has taught English at secondary level. She now works as a freelance editor and writer. She is the author of *Hey, that's a good idea!* (P.E.T.A.)

Large swans fall off cliffs: large strawberries don't

What's the title mean? Who knows? It's a poem by a five-year-old poet and I used it simply to get your attention. In any case, poems don't have to *mean*. Despite all those earnest secondary school exam-setters, it's enough that they *are*.

So what's the use of poetry in the grim reality of 1980s classrooms where everyone is busy stuffing basic skills into small heads day after day? Ah, because it's the icing on the cake, the feather in the cap, the sparkle in the wine, the secret grin, the satisfying sigh!

Used right, that is.

Too often poetry serves only a utilitarian purpose, is used as a means to an end. Is the class busy gutting brochures and out-of-date encyclopedias for its theme on Dinosaurs? Then quick, flip through the index in that single well-thumbed poetry anthology on the shelf, run off thirty copies (crossing your fingers and hoping the poet's dead), hand them out and feel pleased that your projects are always integrated across the curriculum.

Or about to do a poetry-writing session? Another quick dip and here's a poem perfect for a pattern for the kids to use and never mind if the end result is thirty near-clones of a rhyme that some poor devil sweated over for days. At least you can smile at your language consultant and prove you're covering literature!

How often do we read poetry *for its own sake, as something of value in its own right*?

How often do we hear a teacher say, "If you kids don't shut up, I won't read you any more poetry"?

How often is it just enjoyed?

All right, I've made you feel guilty, but where do you fit it into that already over-stretched, nerve-jangling day? What would *I* do?

Well, I'd use it the way I use stories:

- as a time-filler ("Five minutes before the bell? Listen to this poem . . .");
- as a reward ("I saved this poem for end of day because you've worked so hard.");
- as a bonus ("I'm *giving* a copy of this beaut poem to whoever is ready first.");
- as a tension-breaker ("Come on, we'll go out on the grass and I'll read you some windy poems.");
- as gifts ("Pick a poem you like to give Mum/Dad as a present.");
- as something too good to keep to myself ("Hey listen, I couldn't wait to get to school to read you this!");
- as the butter on my basic skills bread, the icing on my educational cake.

And I'd feel I was giving them something they'll remember long after they've forgotten there was once a time when they didn't know how to divide or how to spell *chrysanthemum*.

Mind you, to do that I'd have to make sure I'd never run out of poems to use. I'd have to collect books of poetry (I might even have to *buy* some myself) and I'd have to read them instead of watching TV some nights and I'd have to find out about poems that have been written since I left school—and I'd run the risk of becoming a poetry addict, someone who needs a daily "fix" to make it through to home-time in good shape.

Viewpoint

There are as many interpretations of a poem as there are readers of that poem. The poem is the catalyst in the transmission of an experience from the mind of the poet to the mind of the reader. I saw that, as a teacher, I had a personal responsibility for every poem that spoke to me, never to be didactic, but always to give room for each child to have his individual experience of that poem.

Griselda Greaves
Signal, September 1979

SATURATION : EXPOSURE : ENTHUSIASM

They are they keys. You've *got* to be so enthusiastic; children can't resist. You have to expose them to so much poetry they catch the fever the way they do measles and chickenpox. You have to saturate the classroom in poetry. You've got to read it to them EVERY DAY from a mixed bag of comic and serious, short and long, fragment or story, pun or cry from the heart. And as you all get involved, as the children's poetry sense grows, then you can move gradually into talking about

Poetic trivial pursuit 16

Q: What is a **Couplet**?

A: Two successive lines of verse (a "little pair") usually rhymed and of the same metre. *Closed* couplets complete the thought within the two lines. *Open* couplets continue the thought from one pair to another. *Heroic* couplets are in iambic pentameter.

Viewpoint

I am certain we know that many of the children who come into our classrooms are not "bathed in language" from their earliest days; many do not even know Mother Goose; and I myself have discovered that as early as first grade I can instantly tell by a child's writing if he has been given good literature, or simply poor books which masquerade as literature at home. I know from the experience of having my poems reprinted in primers and textbooks over the years that any joy which the child might find in reading a poem which I, or any other poet, has written is quickly apt to be dispelled by questions such as: "Why did the poet use a capital here?" "What word rhymes with ear?" "Where did the poet put a question mark and why?" as well as asking questions about the poem which even I can't answer. Perhaps these teachers' aids and workbooks are necessary, for it is possible that I am some sort of idealist who has far more faith in teachers than many educators. I secretly hope that the teacher will simply skip the questions and allow children to just enjoy a poem. If he or she can only apprehend its meaning in the early grades, so much the better. There is plenty of time later to truly comprehend, for even at my age I find myself still searching to comprehend the meaning of many poems and simply wallow about delightedly in apprehension.

Myra Cohn Livingston
"Beginnings", *Language Arts*, March 1978

what poets do, about their content, their skills, their techniques.

For the aim is not just to make children poetry-*lovers*. It's to turn them into poetry-*writers* too, so that a poem can seem as natural a way of expressing an experience, a thought, a feeling as a letter or a report. Why? Because it's not enough to produce people good at writing only prose. That's like drinking water all your life—keeps you alive, but limits your taste buds. Writing poetry is one of the best language experiences there is and language is the most important survival tool we have. It enables us to convey information and share experiences—and so grow food, build houses, cure disease. Without language each of us would be totally alone. Without language we'd probably be extinct now.

Today's children need the best survival tool there is. Not a cheap, basic minimum job, but the best technicolour, deluxe, multi-purpose model in the rack.

Okay, let's roll up our sleeves and plunge into the job of teaching children about *real* poetry, not just a few slick tricks to fill up classroom walls. And for those of you who had rotten poetry teachers yourselves at school, here are some hightly subjective suggestions about what *not* to do, plus some ideas I know work. (Feel free to copy, reject, adapt, scorn or sell, according to your poetry I.Q.)

1. **Forget high-flown sentiments about why poets write.**
   I do it because I like playing with words, because I have an audience of little kids out there and because my publisher pays me for them.

2. **NEVER ask what a poem means.**
   Often the poet, in fact, can't even tell you. After enjoying a poem, whether written by adult or child, ask instead:
   - *What did you feel when I/you read that?*
   - *Did it make you want to experience that?*
   - *Did it make you see something a little differently?*

3. **Forget about definitions and poetic conventions at first.**
   Don't try to teach anything about the form and pattern of poetry until children are really comfortable with poetic language. If you have a bunch of kids in Kindergarten who look like football naturals you don't immediately get them to try out for the first grade team. You give them plenty of ball play, let them have fun running around getting fit, talk to them about the excitement of the game, tell them of famous footballers. Time enough later to talk about limericks and lyrics, ballads and sonnets.

4. **Move into word play.**
   This is the first concrete step. Every teacher knows that play is the business of the child. We take care to build motor skills by encouraging running, skipping and jump-

ing; we choose puzzles and games to help develop thinking skills and to define eye/hand coordination. So, we should give exercises and games to develop word skills.

Want some examples?

(a) **Try making things with words.** (The Greek root for poem is *poiein*—to make.) Try:

- *word posters:* juggling words cut from newspapers, magazines, old readers to create crazy poems.
- *word collages:* pictures or designs with words added to create a theme or actual shape.
- *word mobiles:* combining words on cards with junk, twigs, feathers, shells etc.
- *word chains:* paper chains that spell out poems, rhymes or alphabetical or alliterative messages.
- *word blocks:* made from cardboard, each side bearing one word or sentence, the whole making a poem or slogan.
- *word cards:* index cards are ideal for word designs, fun rhymes, new skipping or counting-out chants. (Turn over, address—and, hey presto, a card for grandparent or friend!)
- *cardboard badges:* bold and provocative, proclaiming *Meet Superkid* or *Rooty-tooty, I'm a Beauty.*
- *T-shirt word designs:* just one giant word (could be ME), a message (arrow pointing up, below it the initials V.I.P.), a poem.
- *play word-scrambles:* make piles of words, dividing into parts of speech. Have a lucky dip, choosing at random from each pile. Then compose a message or poem with what you pull out.

(b) **Try playing with words:**

Aim? To make the children more responsive to the sounds and diversity of words, to help them make discoveries they can use in their own poems, to get the poetic juices flowing.

- *try word choirs:* divide into groups and label nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc. (Call them what you will. I'm old fashioned.) Each group must think up half a dozen examples in its category. Then the choir leader (yourself, until children understand the game well) calls for a word (any word) from whichever group is able to provide the part of speech needed to make a kind of sense. For example, you might end up with something like:
  Sandwiches walk under orange umbrellas with lonely ladies.

Poetic trivial pursuit 17

Q: What is meant by **Dactyl**?
A: A metrical foot of three syllables, one long followed by two short, in falling triple rhythm: *DUM-de-de*. (The word comes from the Greek *daktulos*, finger—the three joints of which are compared with the three syllables.)
Example: **Mer**rily, **mer**rily **shall** I live now . . .

Viewpoint

Having found the time for work on poetry, it is all too easy for the conscientious teacher to approach it with strategies more appropriate to the cognitive areas of the curriculum. Concern as a feeling of disquiet thus has the effect of elevating a series of pragmatic concerns into a teaching method: the anxiety to pin the meaning down to explain words, to take the class on a guided tour through the poem, enlivening it with metaphor hunts and simile chases, inexorably takes over. Worry about rightness, both of a poem's meaning and of our teaching methods, predominates, and the worry is conveyed to the children so that the classroom ambience of poetry becomes one of anxiety at a difficult problem with hidden rules rather than one of enjoyment of a well-wrought object. "Poetry begins in delight . . ." With young children above all, our rightful concern is with this delight. Concern over understanding in the narrow literal sense that requires explanation, annotation, and analysis is misplaced.

Michael Benton
Children's Literature in Education
Autumn 1978

Or it might be much worse. (Combine favourites in a class nonsense-poem book.)

- *rhythm games:* every book on poetry has lots of these, but use also children's own names, playground taunts and chants (the less bawdy ones—if you value your job!) and advertising jingles. Main thing, don't be afraid to stamp and bellow and clap with gusto. (Fussy class next door? Move outside.)
- *inventing games:* invent words to describe the noise a pumpkin would make, or a stone, or a rubber, or a pillow. And words to describe the sound you make stepping in mud, on gravel, sitting on wet grass. (Save for later story and poem writing.)
- *collecting games:* collect words that snap, crackle and pop. Build pools of *quiet* words, *noisy* words, *singing* words, *heavy* words. (Store in jars or boxes clearly labelled.)
- *try playing with popular songs:* make up new words, e.g.
  "Oh how lovely is the evening . . ." (*substitute "soup" or "teacher" or . . .*)
  "My bonnie lies over the ocean" (*My monkey swings over the jungle, my monkey swings over the trees . . .?*)
  "Fly, fly, fly your plane, gently through the . . ."

5. **As you move into writing complete poems, teach children that a poem must have information—why, where, what, who etc.**

   Point out that a poem usually helps the reader share in something the poet felt or experienced and get your pupils to look for their poems in the ordinary everyday things that make up their lives. (A pox on all those child-written poems on old age and death!) Turn them towards the tragedy of forgetting your costume on the first day of swimming, the anguish of dropping an ice cream in the sand, the feel of dirty teeth, the agony of wanting a bike or a dog . . .

6. **Don't expect children to want to write unrhyming poetry if they've only heard poems that rhyme.**

   Of course they're going to try to echo what's been read to them. That's why kids chop the sense about mercilessly so the words fit the rhyming slot, why they ignore teachers' efforts to free them from a stereotyped approach. Brought up on advertising jingles and nursery rhymes, most children feel an unrhymed poem is not a poem at all. So when we say, "Don't bother rhyming", they feel we're suggesting they're not up to writing "real

Poetic trivial pursuit 18

Q: What is **Dimeter**?
A: A line of two metrical feet or a verse written in this metre.

poetry" and want to prove us wrong. And they're crushed when we're not delighted.

What to do? Offer lots more free verse in our reading, be aware of what we ourselves openly prefer and widen their rhyming vocabularies. Try the following:

- *rhyming games:* work in pairs, each picks a word then tries to find ALL the words that rhyme with it. From this, build rhyming pools to dip into later when inventing rhyming couplets.
- *rhyming riddles, e.g.*
  Q: What's a pointed string instrument?
  A: *A sharp harp.*
  Q: What do you call a kitten out jogging?
  A: *A fit kit.*
  (The secret is to start with the answer.)
- *nonsense word poems, based on nursery rhymes:*
  Laddle Biff Huppert
  Sat on a schnuppert
  Beating her . . .
  or
  Snig a snag of serpents
  a huckle full of pie,
  poor and thirsty mackle flirts
  flooping in the wye.

7. **Open up their senses.**
   Explain that really good poems hook into specific details so the reader can see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Help children to home in on what's small, minute and particular and develop an eye for detail by getting them to record what happens during a ten minute span in the classroom, then weave these into a poem. Or study a flower, vegetable, book or person, noting texture of skin, fuzz of hair, smell of . . .

8. **Develop a sensitivity to feeling.**
   How better than by using the stream-of-consciousness technique for journal writing, while children describe how they feel that moment, what's pleasing them, what's bugging them? Or by asking them to try to think their way into the skin of animal, insect or bird, describing the world from *its* point of view? Or by bringing in photographs of themselves at different stages and trying to write about what they felt at that age.

9. **Then, when your budding poets are ready, show them that poems happen by design.**
   Show that poets calculate meanings, orchestrate form and shape, work to achieve an effect. And start giving children some basic poetry skills.

   (a) **Introduce them now to onomatopoeia and alliteration, to simile and metaphor. But beware of those**

Viewpoint

Adults should not be frightened of reading to small children poems that may be considered "difficult". The child may well understand them better than the adult does.
Griselda Greaves
Signal September 1979

Poetic trivial pursuit 19

Q: What is **Double Rhyme**?
A: Two rhyming syllables, e.g. *cheery* and *weary* or *market* and *park it*.

hoary old cliches you had to complete in comprehension exercises 150 years ago. Ring the changes:

NOT—*white as a sheet?* (Today they're candy-striped or brown.)

—*white as paper?* (Mine has blue lines on it.)

—*white as soap powder?* (Not if it's got blue beads in it.)

—*white as blossom?* (Let's go and see if it's really white.)

(b) **Show them form.**

Talk about it (How come it's always in those funny short lines?) and set them to work writing poetry as prose, prose as poetry. Encourage experiments with **shape**:

- tree poems in a tree shape
- mountain-shaped poems of lonely snow-capped peaks
- curving poems about blue-green waves
- soft pillow-shaped poems about clouds
- fat poems, skinny poems, round, square and triangular poems.

(c) **Be bold with content.**

- turn dreams into poems
- rewrite myths, legends and fairy tales as poems
- turn recipes into poems, poems into recipes (recipe for a best friend, an afternoon guaranteed to drive a teacher mad, a wow of a party).

10. **Experiment.**

Experiment with all the types of poems text books have done to death. But try just one year of your teaching life without "doing" haiku or cinquain. *Please*?

11. **Don't get nervous if your pupils want to memorise favourite poems (their own and other people's).**

So, once upon a time there were rigid teachers who enforced rote learning of poetry. That's no reason for memorisation to still have a bad name. Don't tell me children don't enjoy it. Why else do they commit to memory all those TV and radio advertisements, or the words of pop songs, or the names of sporting teams? If we memorise something it becomes a part of us. (How else could I get to sleep if I couldn't recite "Abou Ben Adhem" to myself or tolerate traffic-light hold-ups without chanting *Does the road wind uphill all the way*?) Our understanding deepens, we live with it, never knowing when that cluster of words will flash back across our minds bringing fresh insight, continuing pleasure.

Somehow we've forgotten that originally poetry was spoken, not written, that it was passed on by recitation and that this is why alliteration and rhyme were so impor-

Poetical trivial pursuit 20

Q: What is an **Elegy**?

A: A mournful or plaintive poem, lamenting a death or meditating on a solemn subject. (From the Greek *elegos*, lament sung to flute accompaniment.)

tant—they helped the speaker *remember*. Let children memorise what they like and occasionally set aside a time for reciting, and invite others in to listen.

12. **NEVER forget that poets need a response.**

Every poet from beginner to master needs the chance to share. Your poets will need comments on their work. Not a scribbled *"Good"* or *"Liked this"*, but thoughtful comments from you and fellow poets in the class and a group to respond to questions such as:

- *How did my poem make you feel?*
- *What words or "pictures" did you like best?*
- *Did what I was feeling come across?*
- *Could I make it better?*

13. **Publish original work every way you can think of.**

Do this on broadsheets and posters, in magazines and newspapers, in every kind of home-made book, by using in concerts and demonstrations, by trading with other classes, by deluging principal and parents and by shouting from the school rooftop.

14. **Finally, give children the right to ignore all the advice and go away and feel good about a poem, if that's what they want to do.**

After all, when you've turned them into poets, they'll have the right to *act* like poets.

Viewpoint

Remember, the object at this and every stage is to keep and develop the child's liking for the music of words. Explanations and annotations do not matter. A child's misconception may be of much greater value to him than the explanation which destroys it. I have heard more than once the heartfelt cry, "Oh sir, *please* don't explain it" which showed that imagination had been bruised already by the smashing of a cherished mental picture. Only a pedant will, in such instances, value accuracy above the magic which some word or phrase is exercising on a young imagination.

L. A. G. Strong
Poetry in the School

MOIRA ROBINSON

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How Not to "Teach" Poetry

Be warned! This is an account of how not to "teach" poetry, for it seems to me that the world is already full of adults, including many teachers, who have been put off poetry for life because they were "taught" it at school. They were taught to take poems to bits and leave the poor things lying in pieces; they were *taught*:

- that poems were sly things, full of symbolism and particular meanings designed to trip you up in examinations;
- that poetry was very pure, very special—so special that teachers put on special hushed poetry voices when they talked about it (which is perhaps why they talked about it as little as possible);
- that poetry was a test of memory;
- that it was difficult, an alien art form—which is the one thing that it certainly is not.

Most young children, given the chance, take as naturally to poetry as ducks take to water. They respond instinctively to rhythm from the earliest age—why else do we sing them lullabies? Toddlers play around with language, building words into repetitive rhythmical chants, savouring the delights of rhyming phrases like *Roger the dodger*, entranced by the sound of lines like *Hickory dickory dock*. They attempt to make sense of the world around them by engaging

in those unexpected metaphorical leaps that Kornei Chukovsky describes so vividly in his book, *From Two to Five*. Not only are young children brilliant linguists, as Chukovsky points out, **they are all potential poets in the way they daringly experiment with language.**

Once at school, however, they become increasingly enmeshed in an educational system that has always been haun[illegible] Puritan Work Ethic. That's not altogether a bad t[illegible] haunted by—until it comes to literature and poetr[illegible] Puritan Work Ethic has always been very keen [illegible] on *worthiness* and *work*. Perhaps novels about [illegible]tal break-up could be "useful", for they ra[illegible]tions, but how is one expected to "teach" *Char*[illegible] As for poetry, Basil Bunting's poem, "What [illegible] Told Tom", says it all:

P[illegible]t's a hobby.
[illegible]el trains.
[illegible]re breeds pigeons.
[illegible]of work. You don't swea[illegible]
N[illegible]ly pays for it . . .

Not only is it of doubtful utilitarian value, it poses the problem of *what to do with it* because the Puritan spectre is also very keen on an *energetic* approach to education. We *do* stuff [illegible]ff, we *do* mathematics, we *do* reading; how are we [illegible]ng [illegible]etry? We get twinges of conscience if we ignore it c[illegible] so every now and then we attempt to *do* something [illegible]oetry: we try to "teach" it—and kill it in the pr[illegible]

[illegible]g said all that, we are left with the problem: What do we do with poetry if we are not going to "teach" it?

As we all seem very keen on acronyms these days, I offer you "The Island" approach to not "teaching" poetry, i.e.:

- IMMERSION
- SELECTION
- LISTENING
- ENJOYMENT

(For full effect, the acronym should be reproduced diagrammatically on an overhead transparency with a series of interlocking circles and a welter of arrows!)

At Primary School our main concern should be to give children the opportunity to *hear* as much poetry as possible so that it remains a natural adjunct to their lives—as it was when they were tiny and their mothers or kindergartners sang them nursery rhymes, as it frequently still is outside in the playground. There is no virtue, however, in immersing them in *bad* poems; that does nothing for poetry or for the child, and therefore we need to think hard about *selection*. If we have chosen well, the poems will speak for themselves and all we have to do is *listen* and *enjoy* and devise ways of making children and poems familiar to one another.

Viewpoint

Children have to learn a solid base of physical facts in order to survive. It is as much a part of their inheritance as are the intangibles of Art. But we should be able to present them with logic without destroying their vision of the indefinable, and one way of achieving such a balance would be by making poetry as accessible as television, so that it is just as much a matter of course for a child to have a particular poem read to him her as it is for him her to ask to have a particular television program switched on.

Griselda Greaves
Signal, September 1979

Poetic trivial pursuit 21

Q: What is an **End-Stopped Line**?
A: A line of verse ending with a thought-pause or stop, e.g.
I am the monarch of all I survey.
My right there is none to dispute

IMMERSION

Let's look first at *immersion*. Swimming can't be taught by a fully dressed person standing well back from the edge of the pool shouting instructions; at some stage the teacher has got to get into the water as well. The same is true of poetry.

Immersion starts with *us*; we have got to be in there, reading poems, becoming familiar with the vast range of them, learning to be so comfortable with them ourselves that we can suddenly break out into scraps of verse like

> *Cottleston Cottleston Cottleston Pie*
> *A fish can't whistle and neither can I . . .**

* A.A. Milne, *In Winnie the Pooh* (Methuen)

which has always seemed a peculiarly satisfying piece of nonsense to murmur when one's mind is really on other things. We don't need to know whole poems by heart, but for our own benefit as well as the children's we should stock our minds with lines or images that especially appeal to us, fragments like *I have seen old ships like swans asleep . . .* or *Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright . . .* which we enjoy and want to be able to share spontaneously with others at the right moment.

Once familiar with a range of poetry yourself, immerse children in it so that they become as used to hearing a poem as hearing a novel or picture book. If there are some odd moments left at the end of a lesson, use them to chant with the kids Colin Thiele's rollicking verse:

> *When I went to Byaduck, to Byaduck, to Byaduck*
> *My Grandma said to me,*
> *"Will you try to buy a duck, buy a duck, buy a duck*
> *And bring it home for tea?"*

Read poems instead of stories, poems like Ogden Nash's breezy tale of "Custard the Dragon" or Alfred Noyes' "The Highwayman", "Colonel Fazackerley" by Charles Causley or "The Man from Ironbark".

We need to cultivate a "laid-back" approach. This is nothing out of the ordinary—simply an alternative way of telling a story, and one that comes with the added bonus of **rhyme** and **rhythm**. If the children are flagging towards the end of the afternoon, take time off to read a poem—with no strings attached, no questions, no explanatory comments (unless the children ask something), perhaps something bracing like Irene McLeod's "Lone Dog" or something quiet and sombre like Stevie Smith's haunting poem:

> *Nobody heard him, the dead man,*
> *But still he lay moaning:*
> *I was much further out than you thought*
> *And not waving but drowning . . .*

Whatever *theme* we are doing, make poetry part of it. If we are dealing with *conservation*, for instance, read Spike

Poetic trivial pursuit 22

Q. What is a **Feminine Ending**?

A. The addition of an unstressed syllable at the end of a line of verse.

Milligan's wry poem "Goliath"; if we're talking about Aboriginal beliefs, read aloud Mary Gilmore's poem, "The Great Snake". We should never box poetry, reserving it for some special time (usually in the future); instead it should be made part and parcel of everything else that we're doing with language.

SELECTION

But there is no point in attaching a poem to a theme or to a book we're reading unless it stands by itself as a *good* poem. Bad poems rapidly become like cliches in writing or art: they substitute for the good with such confidence and frequency that we come to accept them as the norm while wondering why the norm seems so stale and uninspired. Bad poems blunt the appetite for the good, so avoid like the plague verses that are trite, vapid or hackneyed, poems that dribble on about nothing at all—like this one:

I love to see the butterflies,
Their colours bright and gay.
I love to touch their pretty wings
But then they fly away.

I wrote it, so I have no compunction in attacking it savagely! Obviously its very metre is trite, the stress so regular that the whole verse becomes entirely bland—but don't therefore damn all metrical rhymed verse on principle. It's quite possible to retain energy and excitement if the poet is conscious of normal speech rhythms cutting across the regular stress, as in this verse of Walter de la Mare's about "Tom's Little Dog":

Tom poised a lump of sugar on
His nose; then, "Trust!" says he;
Stiff as a guardsman sat his Tim;
Never a hair stirred he.

The scansion of this is exactly the same as in my appalling verse, but it is immediately given an exciting elasticity of form because no one with any feeling for poetry would emphasise the last beat of the first line which falls on the insignificant *on*. Instead one hurries across the lines to reach *nose*.

In the same way, Walter de la Mare makes the reader alter the *pace* of the words so that he avoids the trite regularity of my own poor verse. We automatically pause on *then*, for instance, in the second line, even though it's actually unstressed, because it has a very deliberate semi-colon before it and a comma after it, and we are compelled by the sense to pause again on *Trust*. Good poetry, like any other piece of good writing, should resemble a piece of elastic—now stretched out taut, now relaxed, always adapting to the needs of sense.

Viewpoint

Much of the finest literature of the world is poetry. For most people it is remote, inaccessible—the Greeks saw it as a mountain, where the muses live. But you don't climb a mountain by taking longer steps: you take shorter steps and more time. Therefore, in addition to the pleasure at the time, childhood reading of poetry is making possible later adult reading. Any book which gives pleasure is valuable. If it leads on to wider experience, it is doubly valuable.

Alan Tucker
Signal May 1979

Poetic trivial pursuit 23

Q: What does **Foot** mean in poetry?
A: A rhythmic unit of language, containing two or three syllables.

The other strength of de la Mare's poem can be seen even more clearly in the concluding verse:

> *"Paid for!" says Tom; and in a trice*
> *Up jerked that moist black nose;*
> *A snap of teeth, a crunch, a munch,*
> *And down the sugar goes.*

He is specific in his use of words, in phrases like *moist black nose*, and he uses language that brings a particular incident vividly to life, words like *snap*, *crunch* and *munch*. In my magnum opus, the descriptions are all generalised (*colours bright and gay, pretty wings*), vague, wishy-washy phrases that present no clear image to the reader because there was no specific image in my mind as a starting point. Poetry that starts from the specific may not necessarily be good poetry, but *poetry that starts and ends with generalities is doomed to failure*.

Good poetry **interacts** with its listeners or readers. We may be excited by the **rhythm** of something like:

> *A piper in the streets today*
> *Set up, and tuned, and started to play . . .**

* Seumas O Sullivan, "A Piper" in *I Like This Poem* (Puffin, 1979)

or by the **sound** of Eve Merriam's words in her poem, "Weather":

> *Umbrella umbrella umbrella umbrella*
> *Bumbershoot barrel of rain.*
> *Slosh a galosh slosh a galosh*
> *Slither and slather a glide . . .*

We may be excited by **imagery**. We may enjoy poems because they are **funny** or downright daft like Spike Milligan's "On the Ning Nang Nong", because they make us feel happy or make us feel sad or make us *feel something*.

If you read a poem and it doesn't touch you in any way, give it a miss; it may be beautifully rhymed and full of worthy intentions, but it's obviously not working for you as poetry. By the same token, never exclude poems on the grounds that they are not "proper" poetry, e.g. that they are mere "verse" or "jingles" or simply not "quite nice". I'm thinking of things like Rolf Harris' "The Ladies of the Harem of the Court of King Caractacus" with its tumbling words, or Tony Connor's "Child's Bouncing Song", which starts bluntly (*Molly Vickers/Wets her knickers . . .*) or traditional tongue-twisters or riddles. If it's working as poetry, if it *excites* because of sound or rhythm, imagery or story, because of the *feelings* it evokes, because it's first and foremost *enjoyable*, then stop worrying—**it's poetry** and it's waiting to be *shared* with an audience.

On the Ning Nang Nong

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
And the Monkeys all say Boo!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the tea pots Jibber Jabber Joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang!
And you just can't catch 'em when
they do!
So it's Ning Nang Nong!
Cows go Bong!
Nong Nang Ning!
Trees go Ping!
Nong Ning Nang!
The mice go Clang!
What a noisy place to belong,
Is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!

Spike Milligan

LISTENING

The most obvious way of sharing poetry is to read it aloud, for, like music, it is essentially an aural art. When a poet is

first writing a poem he continually reads it aloud to test the *sound* and *rhythm*, he is constantly adjusting phrases until the words fall on the ear in just the right way. If a poet designs a poem to be *heard*, then at the receiving end we need to *hear* it. A poem on a page is a dead thing until it's read aloud at the pace the poet has indicated, for its meaning, its mood, its impact are all contained in the *sound* it creates. Death, then, to poems written up silently on blackboards in the hope that some amazing poetic osmosis will occur in the classroom; it only will if children are already so geared to poetry that they transform the words into sounds inside their own heads.

Listening, as we all know, is an important skill in its own right, but it is also, like reading, a *creative* act. We listen to lines like these,

> *I heard the old, old men say,*
> *"Everything alters,*
> *And one by one we drop away".*
> *They had hands like claws and their knees*
> *Were twisted like the old thorn trees*
> *By the waters . . .**

and the words create sounds that make inside our minds a collage of images, of emotions, of associated experiences and sense impressions. That is why we should let poems speak for themselves, because the effect they can create in an environment receptive to poetry is often so subtle, so multi-faceted that *nothing more is needed*.

Who wants a detailed explanation of what Rudyard Kipling is writing about in "The Way through the Woods"? It's infinitely more important that we should feel the *enchantment* of "the old lost road" and respond to the words each in an individual way, shaped by personal experience. If we happen not to respond, no amount of explanation will help anyway.

Teachers have this terrible urge (again perhaps a legacy of the Puritan Work Ethic) to try to make everything plain and comprehensible, but a great deal of art doesn't operate in this way; *it thrives on ambiguity*, on things half understood, half apprehended, on a degree of mystery rather than straight answers. It doesn't matter whether children know exactly what a *quinquireme* is when we read John Masefield's "Cargoes"—what does matter is the magical sound of the words themselves: *Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir . . .*

Words have, for children, something of the same potency as ritualistic squares chalked on asphalt or the stones used in certain playground games. When we read poetry aloud we need to preserve the potency and mystery of those words—just as we should, when it's obviously right, preserve the mystery of poems, as a whole, intact. Looking through that highly instructive anthology, *I Like This Poem* (Puffin), time

Viewpoint

Not all of us are poets. But is not all of us have the desire, the gift and the training to turn our experiences into poems. But we can all, if we will, train ourselves to read poetry. We can appreciate and enjoy what poets have made of the emotions we feel. Poetry can in this way give us the sense of sharing our experiences, and can help us, if the experience is painful, to bear it more easily. Poetry makes us less alone in the world.

James Reeves
The Poet's World (Heinemann)

* W.B. Yeats, "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water" in *Bulls Eyes* (Kestrel, 1977).

Poetic trivial pursuit 24

Q. What is **Free Verse**?
A. Unrhymed verse without a metrical pattern. Its lines are divided according to cadences, or natural speech patterns.

and again one comes across the comment, "I like this poem because it's like a really mysterious mystery", or "because it has a sense of mystery". It was the sense of something not fully understood that drew me as a child to lines like *In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure dome decree . . .** or *My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair . . .*†, to poems like Turner's "Romance", Belloc's "Tarantella" or Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", and when one looks through *I Like This Poem*, there they all are, as potent in their mystery as they were a generation ago, giving but chosen by today's children because they still give them the same intense enjoyment.

* S.T. Coleridge. "Kubla Khan" in *Collected Works, Oxford Book of English Verse* and etc.
† P.B. Shelley. "Ozymandias" in *I Like This Poem* (Puffin, 1979).

ENJOYMENT

Enjoyment, after all, is the whole basis of poetry—as it is of literature in general. The author needs an audience and the audience needs to find a book or poem that virtually says: "Read me, make me yours". Literature isn't something remote and self-contained, it's where writer, reader and poem or novel meet and interact with one another, not necessarily favourably, but actively and with zest. In this process the teacher's functions are two-fold:

- The first should be to connect children with as many different sorts of poetry as possible as often as possible and in as unthreatening a way as possible. Read poems, chant them together, say them, get children to make their own anthologies and share their favourites with the rest of the grade.
- Secondly, the teacher should devise ways to make children and poems better acquainted with one another, for the value of literature lies in what we retain of it. Despite my talk of immersion, the literary experience isn't like a quick dip in a swimming pool; rather it's *a life-long process* of accretion during which images and ideas, words and characters (with all their associated memories and experiences) gradually fill our minds and subtly alter our way of perceiving the world around us. With poetry in particular, familiarity does *not* breed contempt; on the contrary, a great part of its attraction lies in our knowing poems or lines that suit us as comfortably as an old well-worn pair of slippers, and we therefore have to make time and opportunity for poems to become a familiar part of us.

If a poem has been successful, we can read it again . . . and again until children are spontaneously joining in lines like *"Bang!" went the jolly gun. / Hunter jolly dead. / Jolly hare got clean away. / Jolly good, I said.** We are sometimes so

* Charles Causley. "I Saw a Jolly Hunter" in *Tiny Tim* (Heinemann, 1981).

afraid of boring children that we hurry on too quickly instead of lingering to enjoy and renew acquaintance with a poem. Movement and mime will often implant poems in the memory because, just as in playground rhymes, we come to associate words like *Her fingers flicker / Like snakes in the air . . .*† with certain actions.

Similarly, children taking part in dramatised versions of Paterson's "The Man from Ironbark" or "Bad Sir Brian Botany" by A.A. Milne or James Reeves' poem about "Mr Tom Narrow" (who had the distressing habit of trying to sell his grandmother) will tend to remember some of their own lines and to feel that they have a personal stake in the poem as a whole.

The same is true of the "dialogue" poems by Roger McGough, Michael Rosen, Kit Wright or Doug MacLeod. These are amusing, pithy, contemporary poems (often on off-beat subjects like fluff under the bed or cutlery or pigeon fanciers) which can be split up between a narrator and various speakers. With their frequently unorthodox form and content, they cut across children's preconceptions of what poetry should be like, and they make demands on their readers, because it's often quite difficult to work out at first sight which character is saying which line in a poem like Michael Rosen's "I'm the youngest in our house". Words chanted together will often stick in the memory, particularly if, as in Hugh McCrae's *Six white cats in an old tin tub . . . / Muvver has gone to the Pub Pub Pub!* one automatically starts to clap an accompaniment.

We can bring children back for a second or third look at a poem by suggesting they tape-record, for instance, "Sir Smasham Uppe" with suitable noises of crashing china and furniture, or Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky", with appropriate sound-effects for words like *whiffling* or *galumphing*.

From this sort of presentation, it's only a short step to what Keith Gallasch calls "scoring" a poem when, instead of reading it straight through, one treats it as though it were a musical idea and the class a choir or orchestra. Sometimes a single voice might have the melody, sometimes a small group, sometimes everyone; words can be repeated to form an accompaniment, a sort of continuo part; different lines might be spoken together or overlap one another, and pace and volume may be altered as meaning or sound dictate. Generally poems that are fairly free in form, or which already exploit the possibilities of language, lend themselves best to this sort of performance—poems like "Hist Wist" by e.e.cummings, for instance, or Carl Sandburg's "Sea-wash". As we can only discover the most effective way of saying the lines by experimenting, we have the chance to come back again and again to a poem—while our main concern is still for its overall effect.*

† Anon. "Queen Nefertiti" in *Bulls Eyes* (Kestrel, 1977).

Viewpoint

Poetry is one of the major pleasures of reading, simply for its own sake, for pleasure. In the earlier years it takes its place effortlessly as part of normal reading. There comes a point where differences begin, and they begin because of the radical difference between poetry read aloud and poetry on the page. It is more difficult to translate poetry on the page to the silent sound of poetry in the mind than it is to read narrative. It is a mechanical difficulty: the way to overcome it is by practice.

Alan Tucker
Signal, May 1979.

* See Sean Monahan's chapter in this book for further information on "performance" poetry.

CONCLUSION

Almost without realising it, we are "doing" poetry—not labouring to "teach" it, but simply letting it happen by *connecting children and poems in as many different ways as possible.* In the interaction that follows we have a responsibility to both sides:

- we have a responsibility to the **poem**, to be true to its intentions, not to distort them for our own teaching purposes, however worthy, and to preserve the poem's totality of effect;
- we have a responsibility to the **children**, to make poetry something that happens so naturally and spontaneously in the classroom that they recapture the enthusiasm most of them once felt for it as toddlers when poems, as Roger McGough wrote, were something *"that you could smell and taste . . . that came alive and ate you up; poems light and mischievous as balloons".**

* Roger McGough (ed), *Strictly Private* (Puffin, 1982).
Other poems mentioned can, with the exception of "Sir Smasham Uppe" by E.V. Rieu and "The Man from Ironbark" by A.B. Paterson, be found either in the above anthologies or in *A First Australian Poetry Book* edited by June Factor (Oxford University Press, 1983). *Small Dreams of a Scorpion* by Spike Milligan (Penguin, 1973), *The Best Primary Poetry Anthology—Ever!* edited by Lesley Pyott (Longman Cheshire, 1983), *Improving on the Blank Page* edited by Deborah Cook and Keith Gallasch (Rigby Educational, 1972), *You Can't Catch Me!* by Michael Rosen (Puffin, 1982) and *Someone is Flying Balloons* edited by Jill Heyler and Celia Jellett (Omnibus Books, 1983).

LIBBY HATHORN

A Poetry Workshop

LIBBY HATHORN is the author of *The Tram to Bondi Beach*, *Lachlan's Walk* and *Parlo's Secret* (Methuen). Formerly a school librarian, she is now a Senior Education Officer in the Division of Services of the N.S.W. Department of Education.

FIRST, SOME REFLECTIONS ON POETRY

"The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul . . ."

A life without *music* would be hard to imagine. We would be deprived of a great gift that has the power to gladden and charm us, to soothe, exalt, ennoble or arouse us—for it seems that music is able to feed and inspire the human spirit. A life without *poetry* is a life deprived of such a gift, for poetry has the potential to do all this, and perhaps more. Poetry is *the language of our imagination.* It is able to:

- tell us about life and ourselves
- explore how we feel and how we think
- give us a unique view of the ordinary and the extraordinary
- delight and inspire us.

Many writers have attested to the place of poetry in their lives and have stressed its influence and importance. **Aristotle** felt that "Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history". Contemporary Australian author **Shirley Hazzard** says: "It has created everything for me. Poetry gave me companionship, it opened my mind and heart, as far as they could be opened. It's not true that poetry doesn't change things. It changes one's own nature."

It is of especial interest to me that many writers of children's literature express strong feelings about poetry. **Joan Aiken** says that "The best children's writers are

poets—writers who condense experience and make it meaningful by the use of symbols". **Meindert de Jong** feels that "Creative books for children are the nearest things to that purest of all literary forms—the lyric poem". **Russell Hoban** said of the reasons to make poetry that "Time constantly tries to take the world away from us and in the end, of course, it does. Any poem is the writer's attempt to hold on to what world he has and grab a little more if he can." I think that good poems help the reader do the same thing.

But the poets themselves are best able to describe the power of their "craft and sullen art". Australian poet **Judith Wright** says that poetry "deals with experience, physical experience or emotional experience or mental experience and nothing that the poet learns from books or other poets can teach him to make a poem, unless he *experiences* the things he writes and knows them so deeply that they become a personal truth". She agrees with **Walt Whitman's** lines:

Logic and sermons never convince
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

Poetry is concerned with what drives deepest into the soul. However much we may learn academically about night and dampness, unless we have experienced them we do not know the truth about them.

To **Robert Frost** poetry was "A momentary stay against confusion—each poem clarifies something".

Wordsworth felt that poetry is not "composed of special speech opposite to prose, but, rather, that it is heightened prose, lifted to an intensity of communication". He said that it called on the power of intuition, "which transforms an ordinary experience into an extraordinary vision" and that this spontaneous flow of powerful feelings takes its origins from "emotion recollected in tranquillity".

To the poet and artist **William Blake**, nothing was without its divine secret, and revelation was everywhere:

To see the World in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a Wildflower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

Coleridge described poetry as "a more than usual state of emotion with a more than usual order". He said that poetry sprang from a demand for unity "which is the life of imagination".

Whilst we may agree that poetry is indeed the language of our imagination; that it is most able to touch the deepest part of our individual and social consciousness, that it is perhaps the most evocative of our literary achievements, poetry is nevertheless a neglected art form. Many people feel that poetry is limited to the reading, writing and understanding of

Poetic trivial pursuit 25

Q: What is **Haiku**?

A: A Japanese poetic form with only 3 lines and a total of 17 syllables but without rhyme or rhythm, e.g.

Snail, my little man
Slowly—oh, very slowly—
Climb up Mount Fuji!

a special few. And some feel that this intricate arrangement of word, sound and meaning may have no relevance in today's society—unaware through lack of the experience of poetry that it has something to offer everyone, expressing as it does *universal feelings*. But there have been times when poetry was enjoyed by many in a society. Poets of ancient times enjoyed an exalted status as "keepers of their oral history".

Donald Graves points out that where writing flourished in former times, it was one of many forms of expression which *satisfied a human craving for harmony*. To my mind this human need has not changed and yet, in educating our young, we seem to have concentrated all our efforts on what are seen as "tangible" and "intellectual" pursuits, leaving the arts to exist in a separate and self-conscious way.

Children past infants school are quite often deprived not only of the experience of poetry with all its richness and deep significance for life, but of its potential for their imaginative, emotional and intellectual growth.

In seeking to enrich our curriculum, and indeed our lives, we need to give the arts the attention they deserve. A classroom or home that values the reading and writing of poetry (and they should go hand in hand) values the development of important human responses. Through poetry children learn *to listen and to feel and to respond*. The arts then need to be pursued with the same vigour as the traditional academic subjects. But how does poetry translate to the everydayness, the reality of the classroom?

There are numerous ways of encouraging children to "tune in" to poetry. Perhaps the most obvious is the presence of anthologies of poetry of all kinds within easy reach of teacher and students. Incidental reading of poetry for pleasure does much to enhance any literature program. And the communal experience of poetry can be a powerful one. This response, where a child is able to relate his or her experiences to the experiences of others, is a *shared* response—and at the same time can be a deeply personal one. Through sharing the experience of poetry with children you are showing, too, that *you* enjoy and value poetry.

The **Poetry Workshop** described below has been used many times as a way of introducing children to the delights of poetry. It would be equally suitable to be used as means of exploring the possibilities of poetry in a staff meeting workshop.

Viewpoint

The cultural commonplace that poetry is a minority art is a useful cover phrase when we wish to avoid the question of who makes up this minority. I suspect that only a small proportion of English teachers are paid-up members. Along with the rest of society, most English teachers find reading fiction, watching film and television, or going to the theatre more entertaining pursuits than reading verse. Poetry survives in the gaps, if at all. (When *did* you last buy a book of poems?)

Michael Benton

Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978, p. 114

A POETRY WORKSHOP

PURPOSE

To introduce or enhance a program of poetry through a workshop where everyone has opportunity to be an active

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Q: What does **Heptameter** mean?
A: A verse line of seven metrical feet

participant. Through several suggested activities, participants are encouraged to:

- search for,
- choose,
- interpret,
- refine,
- present, and ultimately
- **enjoy** a poem of their choice.

MATERIALS

You will need:

- a selection of poetry anthologies
- a selection of recorded instrumental music and player
- another cassette or record player
- percussion instruments (or anything that will produce sound)
- access to two power points

It is not necessary to record the poetry and music presentation and, if preferred, this can be a "line" presentation.

FORMATION

The workshop will begin in plenary but break into four to five smaller groups working at different appointed locations.

TIME

- Introduction: 5 mins.
- Choice of poem: 10 mins.
- Interpretation: 10 mins.
- Presentation: 10 mins.
- Conclusion: 5 mins.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

Set up a selection of poetry anthologies at locations where groups can comfortably work. Two groups will need access to power points. Set up percussion instruments at one location, recorder and recorded music at a second location, and a recorder at a third. (The remaining two locations need no extra equipment.)

AT THE WORKSHOP

- Explain to the whole assembled group that the purpose of the workshop is to provide the opportunity for them to work in small groups, choosing a poem that they will interpret through one of several forms, for the enjoyment of the class as a whole.
- Outline the following forms as possibilities:
  — poetry through movement or dance
  — poetry and mime
  — poetry and music

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Q: What is **Heroic Verse**?

A: A type of verse suitable for epic or heroic subjects, such as the classical hexameter, the French Alexandrine or the English iambic pentameter. A four line heroic stanza rhymes *a b a b*.

— poetry with sound effects
— poetry televised.
Explain the possible variations of group presentation, e.g. the use of single voice, duet, whole group for particular effect.

- Indicate the time frame, e.g. that they will be allowed ten minutes for group discussion and choice of poem; a further ten minutes for refinement through practice of their presentation; ten minutes for all groups to present their poem; a further few minutes for final whole-class discussions and suggestions.
- Indicate the pre-selected locations around the room (or out in the corridor) for the groups, where the selections of anthologies (and equipment, if needed) have been placed.
- Explain how each group will present the poem of its choice.

GROUP I: Poetry through Movement or Dance
The group searches for a poem which suits interpretation through movement. Explain that very rhythmic poems, and especially nursery rhymes (even for older students), are most suitable for this.

GROUP II: Poetry through Mime
The groups choose a poem to mime. They are asked to do their presentation twice. In the first instance the audience will be asked to guess the subject and action of mime. In the second presentation the mime will be re-enacted as the poem is read.

GROUP III: Poetry and Music
The group chooses a poem and then selects appropriate recorded music to accompany it. The choral presentation is interpreted with the music faded in and out for the desired dramatic effect. The group explores different effects through tape-recording its efforts.

GROUP IV: Poetry and Sound Effects
The group chooses a poem, the rendition of which is accompanied by appropriate sound effects. This can be recorded for presentation.

GROUP V: Poetry Televised
The group chooses a poem to be presented as a television segment fractured by commercials which must attempt to "sell" poetry.

CONCLUDING THE WORKSHOP
After twenty minutes the groups are recalled and each in turn presents its particular interpretation of the poem.

The workshop itself is busy and noisy and fun. But the final presentation is a culmination of all efforts and it is *extremely important* that sufficient time be made available so that each group is able to perform for the assembled audience.

Viewpoint

If appetite, feeling, and love of poetry are to be created it is essential that children should experience poetry regularly so that lasting habits of listening and reading are established. The solitary "poetry lesson" for children, regarded as a fixed period on a school timetable, should now be considered to be outmoded. Poetry should be read *to* some of the children every day, or *by* them if they are able. Much of what is done in other fields of knowledge—in religion, history, geography and nature study, for instance—will also give rise to the experience of poetry. Births and deaths, comings and goings, the seasonal year all provide the motive as well as the occasion. The reading by grown ups to children, who, in general, have no considerable reading powers themselves, is of paramount importance. First readings, like first impressions, matter a great deal. The impact of inspired reading on young ears cannot be overstressed; children should be intrigued from the beginning.

Leonard Clark
Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978, p. 132

Viewpoint

Poetry should be seen as truth—that is, within the context of poetry—because the best poetry sees the world and the life in it for what it is. It does not, or should not, concern itself with the flabby and oversentimental. It is possible for children to come to grips with genuine sensations and experiences and to find themselves involved in a range of feelings by contact with poetry that is as vigorous as it is tender, as uplifting as it is honest.

Leonard Clark
Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978

In a final discussion suggestions could be made for further workshops with different approaches to poetry, e.g. a visual presentation of chosen poems through painting, drawing, photography or slides.

WRITING POETRY

The workshop can be used as a stepping-off place for *poetry writing*. In the first stages, students do find it useful to have *models* for their own writing. A poetry reading followed by a brief discussion which touches on several characteristics of poetry may be enough to motivate students to write. Encourage students to discover and discuss the following characteristics of poetry:

- its shape and pattern on a page
- its compression or brevity
- its rhythm and sound
- the connections of language (imaginative and metaphorical rather than literal).

Make the writer aware of the freedom and *power* one has, as composer, to:

- range through time and space
- search for images
- concentrate meaning using the tools of rhythm and sound.

Make sure that the writer is not overwhelmed by the techniques of poetry writing, pointing out that, in fact, it is not so much the form but *what the poet wants to tell us, about life and ourselves*, that is important. One scholar of literature has said of poetry that it is perhaps "the most complex, mature disturbing and evocative of our artistic achievements". The most exciting prospect for writers young and old must be this: that we have spent "thousands of years exploring the resources of language without yet exhausting them".

R.D. WALSHE

Teaching Poetry Writing
Part of "Process"

R.D. WALSHE was a founding member of P.E.T.A. and was its Publications Editor until 1984. He taught secondary English and History for twelve years and has also worked in publishing and in adult education. He is especially interested in the teaching of writing and is the author of the popular book *Every Child Can Write* (P.E.T.A.).

Anyone who is exploring writing *as process* needs to see that poetry, like all the other kinds of writing, must pass through a process of **pre-writing, drafting, revising**. *Poetry is writing too.* If you think it is all inspiration, then you're saying it is entirely different from other writing—that there is no "process" as in other writing. But there is. I like the way a modern writer, Marty Feldman, speaks of his poetry writing process:

> I write a poem in about an hour, but it takes me about six weeks to edit it down to what is virtually a telegram from me to myself. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/8/1978.)

There's sure to be a lot of inspiration in that first hour, but Feldman knew he hadn't got a "poem" till six weeks later—after a great deal of disciplined crafting; that is, revising and polishing.

Of course other writers may work somewhat differently. The surviving manuscripts of the great poets show considerable variety in composing methods, but there is a strong common element of **revision**, often extensive and painstaking. Plenty of inspiration too, but hardly ever perfection at the first writing, except in very short pieces.

Viewpoint

Good poetry seems as simple and natural a thing that when we read it we wonder that all men can not always speak. Poetry is nothing but healthy speech.

Henry David Thoreau

So let's start simply, by seeing poetry as **writing**. The class is going to do some poetry writing. This is a "writing situation" with the same four basic elements needed for writing in general: there is an intending pupil poet, the *writer*, his or her intended *readers*, a subject or *ideas* out of which a poem will be forged, and the techniques or *craft* that will do that forging. The teacher must have a program that applies each of those elements to the specific classroom situation:

1. WRITER: Win the class to a willingness to try poetry writing.
2. READERS: Help each child to find responsive readers.
3. IDEAS: Help each child to find subjects for poems.
4. CRAFT: Show the children the broad "process" of poetry writing.

Clearly the teacher has a significant helping role. It does not mean that one can "teach the child to write poetry" in the way that mechanical skills like addition or subtraction can be taught by drilling. Only the child can finally inject the creative element that brings a poem to life. But, short of that, the teacher can help enormously—and teachers who know how to do so have often been heard to assert, *"Every child can write poetry!"*

1. WIN THE CLASS TO A WILLINGNESS TO TRY POETRY WRITING

This is by far the most important single contribution the teacher can make. It means a period of preparation before launching poetry writing. It also means a string of rather obvious DON'Ts: *don't* talk poetry to death, *don't* analyse it endlessly, *don't* require written paraphrases, *don't* just order the writing of poetry, *don't* prescribe topics, and *don't* imply that poetry can be tossed off without preparation or polishing. Instead, hasten slowly, working up a good feeling for poetry before moving into writing. You want poetry writing to become not an occasional frill but an accepted everyday possibility—creative and exciting, yes, but not unusual.

- *Example is the best teacher.* Show your enthusiasm for poetry: read them poems you like, make yourself a good reader, let them see your own continually growing anthology of favourites, put fine poems in their way, praise every genuine poetry writing effort, write poems with them sometimes and circulate yours with theirs. From all of this they will infer that you set a high standard and expect their best efforts.
- *Surround them with poetry.* Show them where poetry can be found in the school library, see there are many anthologies in the classroom library, not forgetting anthologies of poems written by children, make wall posters of short poems or striking stanzas.

Poetic trivial pursuit 28

Q. What does **Hexameter** mean?
A. A verse line consisting of six metrical feet.

- *Read poetry aloud as often as possible.* Try to read some poems every day, including many items from your growing collection of poems written by children themselves. "I believe . . . that the period up to about eleven years of age constitutes a golden age for listening to poetry", says the British language authority James Britton.* The children should also be drawn into the pleasures of collective verse-speaking—of classics like Belloc's "Tarantella" and Auden's "Night Mail" and many more recent, strongly rhythmic poems. We need to keep saying that sound is important in all writing and its prominence in poetry sharpens the ear and so benefits the rest of one's writing.
- *Arouse controversy about poems.* Ask, "What is a good poem?" Have the children submit their choices. Argue about short controversial pieces like William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow". Work to produce a balance between a critical attitude and tolerance of different tastes.
- *Promote the collecting of favourite poems.* This is a natural offshoot of reading. Encourage the compiling of a personal anthology or at least the inclusion of self-chosen poems in the personal Journal. Or require the selection of a dozen or so poems for an anthology to be compiled over the whole period of the year. (Incidentally, to copy a poem, writing it carefully and thoughtfully, is an excellent way to *read* that poem, for it draws the attention of eye and inner ear to things that are often missed whilst only reading.)
- *Show that many arts are related to poetry.* Poetry can be spoken, taped, dramatised, chanted, clapped, danced, painted and sung. In particular, show that poetry is close to song (". . . no poem worth the name must ever be without at least the echo or the suggestion of a singing voice"—A.D. Hope) and that all songs need poetry. Not least, pop songs. Raise the question: "What is a good song lyric?" Can they bring in some favourites? What results when most pop-song lyrics are stripped of their surrounding music?
- *Stir the poetic imagination.* Any or all of the influences above can stir the children's imagination, allowing them to glimpse new reaches of experience. They can feel poetry as a new, enticing power. Encourage them to learn the poems they like by heart. If imagination and experience are released in these ways, self-reliant learning will take over from teaching. Imagination, firing up, will awaken the form-creating power of the mind to suggest the outline of a poem.

* James Britton. *Language and Learning*. London, Penguin, 1972, p. 156.

2. HELP EACH CHILD TO FIND RESPONSIVE READERS

Writers need readers. Adult writers usually need to be assured of readers or they don't put pen to paper. Readers are their

Poetic trivial pursuit 29

Q: What is an **iamb** (or iambus)?
A: A metrical foot consisting of two syllables, a short one followed by a long one, in rising duple rhythm: *de-DUM*. **Iambic** is the adjectival form. Example:
I **love** *a* **sun***burnt* **country**
A **land** *of* **sweep***ing* **plains**

purpose for writing. And if we are to end the artificiality of "school writing", we must help children to find real readers. They need them even before the writing begins, not only as an incentive to starting, but so they can *direct* what they have to say; they also need them during the writing, so that "work in progress" can be tried out; and they need them at the end, for getting a thoughtful response which rewards the effort of writing and counts towards the attitude to the next piece.

No kind of "school writing" needs responsive readers more than poetry writing. Which readers, then, might the young poetry writers find helpful or stimulating? Fortunately, whenever readers are sought they can be found—the most useful ones through some form of "in-school publication".

- *Self as Reader.* Writers often say they write their poetry without any readers in mind. The poems are products of a purely internal dialogue. If a reader later appreciates these poems then that is a happy coincidence but they would not modify their poetry if the reader were displeased. Some of these writers make no effort to publish their poems. The purpose was in the writing. Marty Feldman, indeed, after six weeks of editing a poem till he considers it right, then throws it away: "My poems are of no significance to anybody else . . . I don't want to expose them". Clearly, if a child similarly wishes to write for self alone and does not wish to expose a poem then this wish should be respected.
- *An Ideal Reader (Ideal Self?).* The Australian poet, A.D. Hope, says he usually tells inquirers that he does not have any particular readers in mind when he writes, *but* "I say this not because it is really true but because it is too difficult to explain that mostly I have a perfectly definite reader in view, a reader who is more or less formulated or demanded by the poem, a reader who would like, fully comprehend and completely enter into this particular poem".* A few children also seem to have such an ideal reader in mind.
- *Self as Student of Poetry.* Some children, hearing that poetry is studied and examined in the secondary school, will accept the proposition that *writing* poetry for oneself is more instructive than only *reading* it in however many lessons on "poetry appreciation", or, more fairly, that such lessons will mean more to someone who has experienced the writing. "Ideally", declares Rachel McAlpine, "the two should be closely associated. Every poem read by the class gives an opportunity to help them write better poems; every poem they write could be teaching them something about reading poems more sensitively."†
- *"Vanity" Readers.* Poetry, more than any other form of writing, prompts some adults to undertake the expense of publishing their own work or paying a publisher to do so when no publisher will otherwise accept it. These poets

* A.D. Hope. *The New Cratylus: notes on the craft of poetry.* Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1979. p. 106

† Rachel McAlpine. *Song in the Satchel: poetry in the high school.* N.Z.C.E.R., 1980. p. 28

believe they have a message which readers "out there" are waiting to hear. Some children, too, believe this and will exert themselves mightily to publish in a form that can be made available to classmates or pupils at large.

- *In-school Readers.* Most children, while writing partly for their own satisfaction, are stimulated by forms of "in-school publication". This needs to mean more than having a poem pinned to a wallboard. The essence of publishing is to reach readers. The children need real, responsive readers, not casual "viewers" or an anonymous "audience". So who can these readers be?
  - *the teacher*, responding to content as well as form
  - *parent aides*, whenever their help can be engaged
  - *a writing partner*, who can be consulted at any time
  - *a small group*, who regularly share their writing
  - *the whole class*, who discuss poems read aloud by the teacher
  - *the whole class*, as readers of a "book" of pupils' poems
  - *another class*, as readers of such a "book" sent as a gift
  - *a more junior class*, pleased to receive poems from older pupils
  - *the school library*, receiving a "book" of the class's best poems
  - *a school anthology of poetry*, likewise receiving contributions.

3. HELP EACH CHILD TO FIND SUBJECTS FOR POEMS

- *Prefer to find your own subjects for poems.* What other advice is possible? Of all the kinds of writing, poetry depends most heavily on strong personal feeling, and that is most likely to be aroused by a child's own experiences—past or present, at home or at school—rather than by the teacher's topics. But children who are not used to finding their own topics will look to the teacher for some help. Short of presenting a ready-made topic, the teacher may: talk the problem over in individual *conference*; provide the class with a wide range of *suggested topics*; or provide *experiences* believed likely to produce poetic inspiration. Let us explore this last course . . .
- *Watch for a poetic inspiration!* This is an unfailing discussion-starter. But what is inspiration? What is poetry? Asked to define "poetry" even the greatest of all dictionary makers, Dr Samuel Johnson, was forced to exclaim, "Why sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is."

So we can't expect definitions to help much. Wordsworth said poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity". That usefully puts feeling in a strong position. D.H. Lawrence said, ". . . the essential quality of poetry is that it

Viewpoint

The essence of poetry is invention. Such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights.

Samuel Johnson

Poetic trivial pursuit 30

Q: What is **imagery**?

A: The use of language to create pictures, as well as other sense-impressions, such as sound and movement, e.g.

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

Tennyson, The Eagle

makes a new effort of attention and 'discovers' a new world within the known world". Which puts awareness, mental openness, in the prime position. Rather than pursue further definitions—there have been many!—it could be more profitable to follow Dr Johnson's thought that the children can *tell* poetry when they see or hear it. Try handing out poems on sheets: children can mark what they regard as specially poetic. A good discussion arises, not only about rhythm, rhyme, pictures, and figures of speech, but also about the individual spirit and meaning of each poem. "How might this poem have come about?" Through strong feeling for some aspect of an experience—feeling, or "emotion recollected in tranquillity", which prompted thoughts to flow and cluster until an inspiration, perhaps a fine first line, started the poem moving.

- *I'll tell you how my inspirations come.* Children are helped by a teacher who reveals his or her own experience of how-a-poem-happens. The present writer would say: "We live a fast-moving existence bombarded ceaselessly by noise, media, people, a great *quantity* of stimulation. Always hurrying we are in danger of missing out on *quality* as we rush along barely able to speed-read the passing world. So when I feel something deeply I try to hold that feeling close to me till I get an inspiration for a poem. For example, after an early morning run on a beach, I . . ."

  Or you might know anecdotes about the great poets. Here is that master of the short poem, A.E. Housman (1859-1936):

  > I would go out for a walk of two or three hours. As I went along, thinking of nothing in particular . . . there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two or verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of . . .*

- *Inspirations arise from experiences.* Inspirations don't come at random. They arise when one is absorbed in an area of experience. Housman, for instance, was absorbed in the countryside of Shropshire. Every child has already had a wealth of experiences that can be drawn on. And the stream of experiences continues. Whether in the home or in the playground or in an active classroom, the child is constantly in touch with experiences that can trigger inspirations for poems.

  Teachers don't need to devise super-dramatic or bizarre experiences for them, nor even cute ones like blowing bubbles or cuddling cats—though these or *any* experiences are not excluded. To begin with, the message of "every-dayness" is salutary: a wealth of everyday things, plants, creatures and people surrounds all of us, waiting to be noticed and valued. And beyond that, the classroom can

* Quoted in Brewster Ghiselin. *The Creative Process*. Mentor, 1958. p. 91

Poetic trivial pursuit 31

Q. What is meant by **Initial Truncation**?

A. The omission of an expected unstressed syllable at the beginning of an iambic or anapestic line of poetry, as in the third line of the following:

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder high.

provide new experiences galore.

Here for reference is a brief and general list of the kinds of commonly shared experiences teachers provide in a bid to encourage poetry writing:

—*Discussions.* "What do you feel when . . .?" "Do you get moody?" "What is the happiest . . .?" "Let's talk about dreams . . ."

—*Books (and TV).* "Are you currently enjoying a book (or program)—its action, characters, special incidents, description . . . anything?"

—*Word Play.* Play games with words, devise strings of alliterative words, write nonsense verse, chant couplets . . .

—*Free Writing.* Write without forethought, quickly or slowly, or simply doodle, till good phrases crop up; then use these to start a poem.

—*Sense Exploring. Listen* to mood music . . . *Look* at a scene or photo or painting . . . *Smell* flowers, crushed leaves . . . *Taste* a variety of foods . . . *Touch* specially "feelable" objects . . . How many words can be attached to these and other sense impressions?

—*Outdoors.* A hot day, a windy playground, walking in the rain, a bushwalk, town traffic, window shopping, a rubbish tip . . .

—*Forms.* Shown one of the many forms of poetry, children can be asked to compose within it.

While any of these experiences *might* trigger a poem, individual children might equally be left uninspired. A different choice should always be open to them, including, on a "down" day, prose. Let them, for instance—indeed, encourage them—to write a vigorous paragraph, jumping straight into the subject with a bright opening sentence, saying what needs to be said without fancy adjectives, and ending with an effective sentence.

At the same time, care is needed to avoid a state of over-dependency on the teacher: "I can't write a poem because you haven't provided a stimulating experience". If poetry is to become a common occurrence—or not uncommon—then the whole environment of the classroom "writing community" rather than a contrived stimulus should evoke it. Doubly true for the relatively spontaneous generation of poetry writing is the kind of classroom environment which Donald Graves' United States survey found to be productive of writing in general:

> Where writing flourished, it was but one of many forms of expression. Once personal expression was valued it popped up in many areas; it could not be contained by writing alone. Nor did writing succeed if it was but one form of expression. Drama, storytelling, music, painting, choral speaking, crafts of all sorts, movement and dance were in evidence . . .†

† Donald Graves. *Language Arts*, N.C.T.E., May, 1978.

Viewpoint

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony there is poetry in its birth. If history is a grave study poetry may be said to be graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that while it shows us the object, throws a sparkling radiance all round it. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms, feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It is strictly the language of the imagination, and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power.

William Hazlitt

Lectures on the English Poets (Dent)

Viewpoint

Poets are not accidental geniuses. They learn their moving craft by long apprenticeship to that most slithery matter—language—and its protean shapes are an endless quest. Children are natural poets, singing before they speak, metaphor-making before they master their way to school. How often must they find it strange that we offer them, as if it were a fine gift of an expensive man, what they have already made for themselves.

Margaret Meek
Signal, May 1981

4. SHOW THE CHILDREN THE BROAD "PROCESS" OF POETRY WRITING

- *There is no instant poetry.* Children are usually surprised to learn that poets don't write instant poems in a fine flow of unbroken inspiration. The notion of "process" needs to be applied as much to poetry as to other writing: poetry has to pass through stages of pre-writing preparation, drafting and revising, and polishing for publication. But to put this so baldly is to summarise the poet's fascinating craft in the dullest, most general terms. Far better to report what poets themselves say about their composing processes. For example . . .
- *Let's look at the way two poets write.*

A.E. Housman, in the quotation above, was speaking about his pre-writing stage, up to the point of inspiration. When he arrived home from that walk, he wrote down his inspired lines. Sometimes he would have to leave gaps, hoping they would be filled another day by further inspiration. If that didn't happen, ". . . the poem had to be taken in hand and completed by the brain . . . involving trial and disappointment, and sometimes ending in failure". He tells of a four-line stanza which would not "come": it had to be written and rewritten thirteen times during the course of more than a year before he considered it right (*op. cit.*, p. 91).

A.D. Hope, the Australian poet, is even more explicit in his outstanding book on the poet's craft, *The New Cratylus* (pp. 98-9). He sees "fully spontaneous poems" as extreme instances and has himself never written one. Most poems have both "spontaneous" and "premeditated" elements. When reading, listening to music, digging in the garden or shaving, he may find that something triggers an idea which, with excited expectancy, he recognises as material for a poem. Then in a flash, or unfolding in a few seconds, "the whole plan and structure and 'feeling' of a possible poem presents itself". From that point he might either make a note or start to compose. The rest may have to be deliberate invention ("routine carpenter's work") but varied elements often "continue to well up" and these may even lead to alteration of the original plan. Usually, he says, "I work slowly, piecemeal, trying alternatives, fitting, improvising, and often stopping because I cannot hit on the word or image which I feel is waiting just around the corner. Some poems, even quite short ones, are years a-growing."

Children are greatly helped if the teachers who relate such composing experiences of the poets also share with them the joys and agonies of writing poems and report their *own* experiences. Indeed it is the commonplace of a good

Poetic trivial pursuit 32

Q. What is a Limerick

A. A popular form of light, humorous verse, popularised by Edward Lear's A Book of Nonsense (1846). A limerick consists of five lanapestic lines of which the first, second and fifth have three metrical feet and rhyme together and the third and fourth have two metrical feet and rhyme together. e.g.

There was a young lady of Wilts,
Who walked up to Scotland on stilts.
When they said it is shocking
To show so much stocking
She answered "Then what about kilts?"

classroom "writing community" to continually discuss composing. The long-term purpose of all the class's writing is to enable every child to get to know intimately his or her own "process" in all its individuality.

- *But what is poetic utterance?* If the "poetry" that emerges from children's earnest efforts turns out to be flat and dull, what can be done? First and foremost their ears (and "inner ear") need to be accustomed to the sound of poetry, and this calls for abundant reading both *to* them and *by* them. Only that way will they catch a sense of poetry's distinctive liveliness. The writer-teacher Hughes Mearns was trying to capture this sense when he asked his pupils, "Do you ever talk to yourself?" At once they were interested; yes, of course they did. "Well, poetry is like talking to yourself!" It was no definition of poetry, just a will-o'-the-wisp half-truth that took hold of their imaginations and swept them into poetry writing . . . those vivid moments of talking to oneself, meaning-full, feeling-full, intimate, touched by drama.

  "Everything written is as good as it is dramatic," the American poet Robert Frost once asserted. Especially poetry! Frost himself continually sought to inject a dramatic "tone of voice" into his poems. In an attempt to demonstrate this spirit of poetic utterance to schoolchildren he wrote three flat, prosy sentences on a blackboard:

  The cat is in the room.
  I will put the cat out.
  The cat will come back.

  Then, declaring, "All the fun's in how you say a thing", he rewrote the sentences to sound like speech with that touch of the dramatic which enters bright conversation:

  There's that cat got in.
  Out you go, you cat.
  What's the use. She'll be right back.

  A.D. Hope says much the same: "There is a sense in which a poem is a kind of conversation with an unknown person" (*ibid.*, p. 19). Everything, finally, depends on the sensitivity of the young poet's ear as he or she becomes absorbed in a talking-to-yourself "conversation".

- *How important are the poetic forms?* They are extremely important to young writers. We must surround these writers with examples of every possible poetic form. Some poetry teachers go so far as to say that the main challenge in poetry teaching is not to provide more experiences but to help the child find forms through which they can successfully express aspects of the experiences they have already had in plenty.

- *How much technique (crafts) should we teach?* Too many adults have wanted to create poetry without any effort.

Poetic trivial pursuit 33

Q. What is **Metre**?

A: The rhythmic arrangement of syllables in verse, usually according to the number and kind of feet in a line. (From the Greek *metron*, measure.)

After initial hopeful excursions they have gone on failing for want of seriously working at technique, which is the skills, methods, craft that need to be applied to a shapeless mass of subject-matter in order to select elements and combine them so that they communicate vividly to the reader. The technique of a mature poet is complex. How much do children need? One can only answer tentatively, "As much as they *currently* need". This is not an evasion. There needs to be a growth in technical competence as children progress through the school. What follows is a minimum of technical knowledge that should be known by the teacher. Parts of it can be passed on to a child as he or she asks for help or reveals a need. On no account should the whole of it be taught or drilled in abstract, apart from children's composing efforts.

The base: "process". The "process" concept is immensely important for primary or secondary poetry writers because it provides a sound, easily grasped base of technique or craft. It explains that there are stages in the writing of a poem: a pre-writing experience out of which comes some kind of "inspiration"; then perhaps, but not necessarily, a plan; followed by drafting, revising and polishing. All other technique can be built on repeated experience of this framework.

The "process" idea, especially "revising and polishing", should not be presented in a way that makes poetry writing seem time-consuming and difficult. Its intention is positive. For example, the draft poem of a young writer, produced in perhaps 15-20 minutes, will probably contain some clumsy elements such as a forced rhyme, a lapse of rhythm, an inappropriate image. The child almost certainly senses the weaknesses but may not be able to spot them and may simply conclude, "I can't write poetry". Assistance here from the teacher (or a writing partner) can be invaluable. Then a 10-minute revision can lift the poem to a better level.

Rhythm. Everyone understands that poetry is strongly rhythmic, and this relates it to the great natural rhythms which sway our lives: breathing and heartbeat, sleeping and waking, hunger and satisfaction, night and day, winter and summer.

Metre. Metre needs to be distinguished amidst the numerous rhythms of a poem. It is the poem's underlying pattern of repetition which would become monotonous (like the mechanical beat of a metronome) if the *actual* rhythms of the poem did not introduce variations. Metre is sufficiently described to young children by showing the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in the "feet" or rising, falling and blended rhythms:

Poetic trivial pursuit 34

Q: What does **Monometer** mean?
A: A line of verse consisting of one metrical foot.

RISING . . .	*Behińd him róde two gaĺl ant squíres*	
	Of nób le nan e and knĺght ly sirés,	
FALLING . . .	*Plúnder of Ápril's góld we soúght,*	
	Líttle of Ápril's ánger thoúght	
BLENDED . . .	*Loóp up her tŕesses*	(falling)
	Escapéd from the cómb	(rising)

Rhythms beyond metre. All of Shakespeare's plays use the rising iambic pentameter (five feet) metre yet infinite *variations* of rhythm keep the plays from sounding monotonous. A poem's metre maintains a central presence, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, amongst the many other rhythms of the poem. The rhythms which vary from the metre are accorded by the poet a degree of freedom, a long lead as it were, so that at times they seem to amble, trot or frisk independently, yet they are finally unable to break completely free from the controlling metre. If they did, the poem would lose its patterned distinctiveness, becoming either prose or free verse. These errant rhythms that a sensitive ear may detect playing around the metre may be traced to many alternations, most of them subtle: stressed and less stressed syllables which depart from those of the metre; the sounds and pauses of speech; rises and falls in pitch (intonation); consonants and vowels; long and short syllables; soft and hard sounds; rhyme, usually at the end of lines but sometimes within lines; alliteration; assonance . . . and on top of all of these, the strong rhythmic influence of "reading for sense", which is likely to downplay any too obvious manifestations of metre or other rhythms.

Rhyme. Some teachers, despairing of children's contrived rhyme, have been heard to ban rhyme and even say, "Good poets no longer use it". But though rhyme did become unfashionable in "free verse" quarters from the 1920s onward, many poets continued to use it and it is currently enjoying something of a return to fashion. Anyway, children enjoy rhyme so much, they are so steeped in it—through riddles, spells, nursery rhymes and counting rhymes, not to mention TV ads and pop songs—and they are so resolved that it is the very hallmark of poetry that to ban it from the classroom is both unwise and ineffectual. Rather we can show that it is often not needed, that poets do not always use it, and that above all it should never be forced—instead, "Always prefer the most *meaningful* word, while perhaps waiting to see if a better or equally meaningful rhyming word comes to mind".

Free verse. This term has had many interpreters. Its central meaning is verse freed from the constraint of metre. Thereby the poet is freed to vary line lengths and rhythms as desired—always, however, within the limits of what

Viewpoint

Poetry is essentially a game, with artificial rules, and it takes two—a writer and a reader—to play it. If the reader is reluctant, the game will not work.

Poetry . . . is a kind of musical word game which we value because of its expressive qualities. Not all poems are equally musical, or equally playful, or equally expressive. Nor are they necessarily musical, playful, or expressive in the same way. But we can consider these three qualities as the basic constituents of poetry. . . . If a piece of writing is neither especially rhythmical nor especially ironic or metaphorical in its language, it is not poetry, regardless of its dramatic situations or the ideas it presents.

Robert Scholes
Elements of Poetry,
Oxford University Press, London, 1969, pp. 1, 7, 60.

Poetic trivial pursuit 35

Q: What is an **Octameter**?
A: A line of verse consisting of eight metrical feet.

sounds "poetic" to a sensitive ear. There is no regular rhyme, though occasional rhyme or hint of rhyme is not uncommon. Some teachers promote free verse, believing it enables children to escape the excessive rigours of strict poetic form; others disagree, believing it tempts children to abandon the struggle for poetic utterance and to flatten their expression into prose. Every teacher must find a position between these viewpoints. Many authorities warn against seeing free verse as easy. At the very least it demands a dramatic tautness line by line, and skill in arranging the whole poem on the page so that it appeals to the reader's eye.

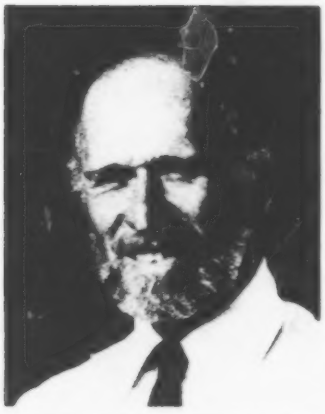
Imagery. This term, too, carries many meanings. It was at first applied to the "mental pictures" summoned by a poem; but this meaning has broadened to include whatever recreates in the reader's mind and every poem should be viewed as an image compounded of lesser images. Some poetry achieves a dense texturing of imagery. Thus four senses are reached by Tennyson's two short lines:

> *And many a rose-carnation feeds*
> *With summer spice the humming air.*

Often, imagery has mistakenly been limited to "figures of speech", especially metaphors (including similes, which are only metaphors introduced by "like" or "as") but it is also conveyed by literal description. In Ezra Pound's broad definition, imagery is "a verbal concentration generating energy"; he also declared that "the proper and perfect *symbol* is the natural object". What is important for children is that they should become sensitive to all vivid imagery in a poem, whether figurative or literal. This is infinitely preferable to sending them on mechanical searches for similes and metaphors.

Children do take over, consciously or unconsciously, the forms, metres and sometimes even the subjects of the poems they read or hear: a strong element of imitation is inevitable. But originality—whether inspired or thoughtfully devised—can appear in children's verse from their earliest efforts. "Teaching" means encouraging the writing of poetry by every means, surrounding the young poets with the utmost variety of models, helping them find answers to craft problems, and nurturing every gleam of originality that shows.

GORDON WINCH



Poetry and Performance 1

Teacher as performer

Gordon Winch is Head of the Department of English at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education (Sydney, NSW) and the author of children's books *The Five Bike Family*, *Barrington's Board Shorts* and *Popcorn and Porcupines* (Hodder and Stoughton). He was the first President of the Primary English Teaching Association.

One way to bring poetry to life for children is to make use of its potential for **performance**. This can be done by taking the special qualities of poetry that are inherent in the form and extending them—with a little imagination. In the main, poetry is meant to be performed: the ballad to tell a riveting story; the love poem to stir the affections; the humorous poem to awaken the comic spirit; the reflective sonnet to stimulate the mind.

Poems are written in particular ways to make performance easier. There is music within the lines waiting to be released: rhyme, rhythm and repetition of sounds within words are only some of the built-in features which make poetry a ready medium for performance. It is surprising how easy it is to use these qualities when working with poetry and equally surprising to see how richly rewarding the results can be.

PERFORMING FOR AN AUDIENCE

Although a poem can be "performed" for an audience of one, it is much more common to entertain a large or small group. To do this, consider which poem or poems you plan to

use and then develop your strategies accordingly. It is a good idea to select a number of poems of the same type (humorous poems for instance) or poems about the same topic (food, animals) and write a simple linking script.

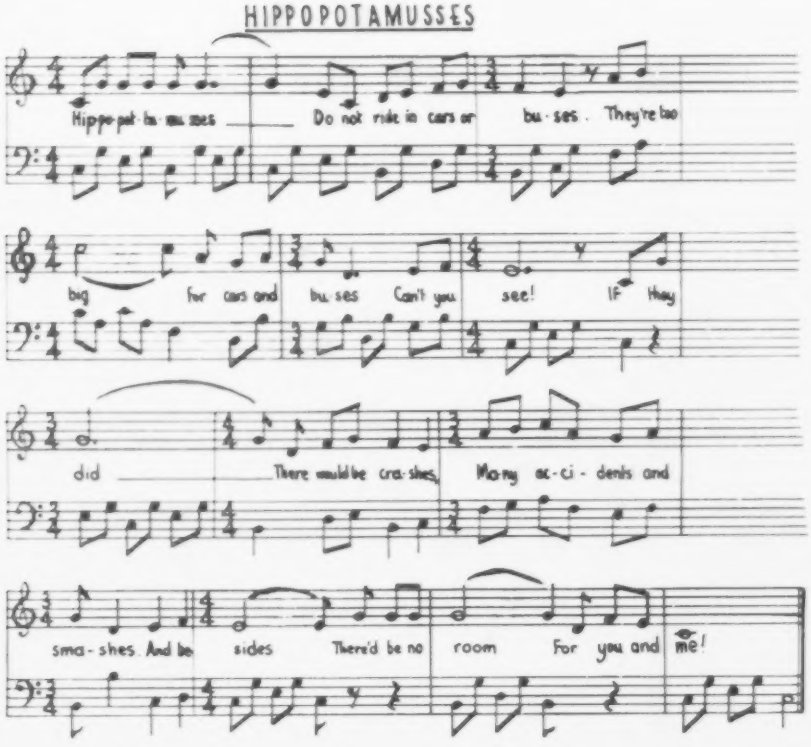
To illustrate this technique I am including a number of poems and a linking script used by Barbara Anderson and myself at The Hills Grammar School in Sydney.*

Barbara and Gordon are seated on stools in front of 50 children. Barbara has her guitar.

BARBARA: How many of you walked to school this morning? (Wait for response.) How many came by bike? (Again.) By car? (Again.) By bus? (Again.)

GORDON: I wonder what it would be like if animals travelled in cars and buses with us. Dogs. Cats. Wombats. Kangaroos. Hippopotamusses. (Wait for noise to die down.)

BARBARA: You don't seem to think it would be a good idea. No, neither do I—and this is why (sings song):

* The script and music were developed by Barbara Anderson, the poems and illustrations in this section are reproduced, with permission, from Gordon Winch's *Popcorn and Porcupines, poems to read aloud*, by Gordon Winch, illustrated by Katrina Van Gendt (Sydney, Hodder and Stoughton, 1984)

HIPPOPOTAMUSSES
Hippo-pot-a-mu-sses Do not ride in cars or bu-ses. They're too
big for cars and bu-ses Can't you see! If they
did There would be cra-shes, Ma-ny ac-ci-dents and
sma-shes. And be-sides There'd be no room For you and me!

BARBARA: Ever thought of having a hippopotamus for a pet?

GORDON: Or a porcupine or a crocodile?!

BARBARA: You would have to be very, very careful. Let me give you some advice.

And a sequence about games could begin like this:

BARBARA: What games do you like most, Gordon?

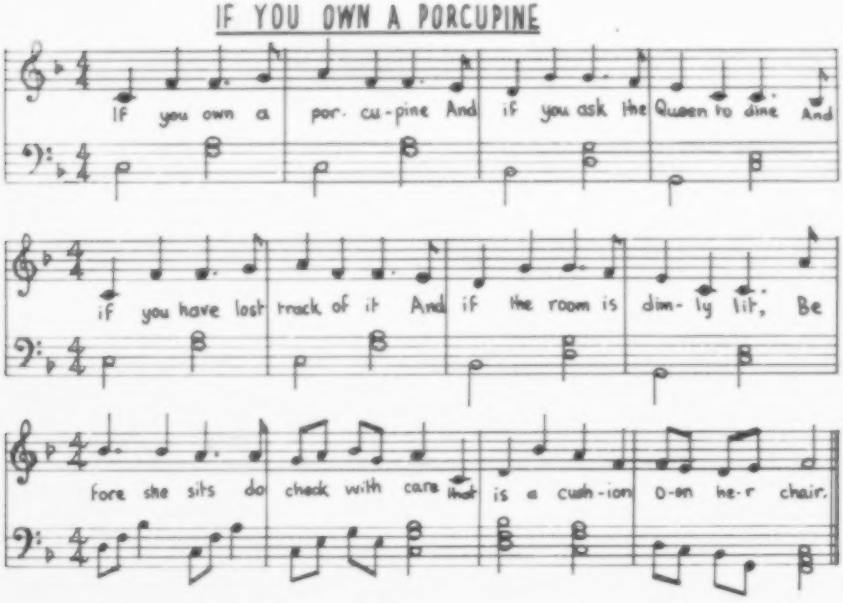
GORDON: Football, cricket, tennis. I like tennis best.

BARBARA: I like tennis, too. I'm sure I'm better than you. What about a game?

Hippopotamusses

Hippopotamusses
Do not ride in cars or buses.
They're too big for
Cars and buses
Can't you see!

If they did
There would be crashes,
Many accidents and smashes.
And besides,
There'd be no room
For you and me!


IF YOU OWN A PORCUPINE
If you own a por- cu-pine And if you ask the Queen to dine And
if you have lost track of it And if the room is dim- ly lit, Be
fore she sits do check with care that is a cush-ion on her chair.

GORDON: Right, but I know I'll win. Who thinks I'll win?

(Children respond vigorously.)

GORDON: Here we go!

An imaginary game of tennis follows. A child hits a tambourine for each shot. Gordon misses and loses. Gordon says poem.

Playing Tennis

Grown ups are good at
Playing tennis.
They smish and they smash
With no trouble at all.

If You Own a Porcupine

If you own a porcupine
And if you ask the Queen to dine
And if you have lost track of it
And if the room is dimly lit,
Before she sits, do check with care
That is a cushion on her chair.

If you own a crocodile
And ask the Duke to stay a while
And if he wants to fondle it
And pat it on the head a bit,
Before he does, without a doubt,
Have all the reptile's toothies out.

The Band

Come and join our brand new band,
We want another star.
Sandy plays the saxophone
And Gertrude the guitar.

Come and join our brand new band,
The best in town by far.
Sandy plays the saxophone
And Gertrude the guitar.

Come and join our brand new band,
Oompah, oompah pah.
Sandy plays the saxophone
And Gertrude the guitar.

But I'm no good at
Playing tennis.
I try . . .
But keep missing the ball.

BARBARA: You need some coaching, Gordon. Who'd like to coach Gordon?

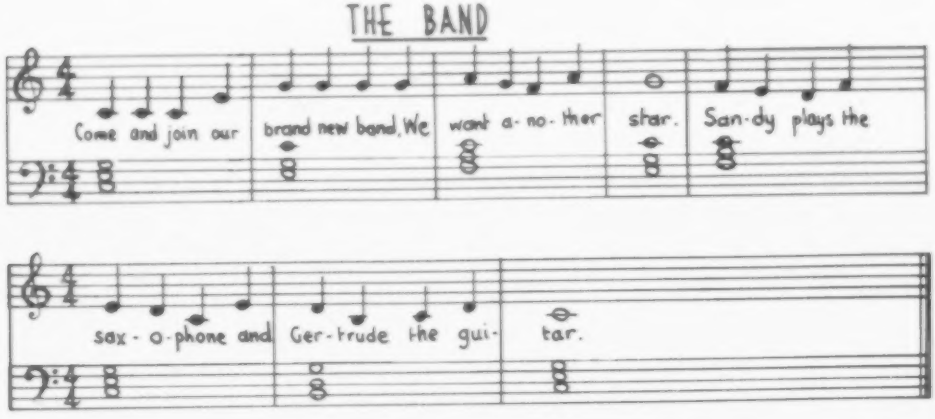
(Child is selected. Teaches Gordon how to serve, volley . . . and so on. Much hilarity!)

GORDON: I think I'm ready for another game now.

(They play. Gordon wins.)

GORDON: Hooray! One each!

When performing to an audience your rendition of the poem is important. Don't be afraid to ham it up if the poem warrants it. And involve your audience when you can, both with the linking script and with saying (or singing) the poem. A few simple props, like a tambourine or a clock, help to involve children and add a special dimension. But it really doesn't matter; it is amazing what you can *imagine* you have. When we worked with the poem "The Band" we had the whole class "playing" their instruments: pianos, saxophones, violins, bass drums, trombones—you name it—and there was not a real instrument in sight, apart from Barbara's guitar.



Because "The Band" is a very simple poem, with plenty of repetition, it was easy to learn. We even added a refrain which went like this:

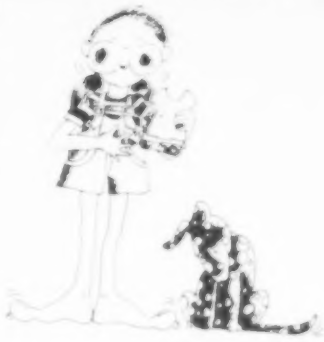
Oompah oompah oompah pah pah
Oompah, oompah pah,
Oompah pah pah oompah pah pah
Oompah pah pah pah.

Poetic trivial pursuit 36

Q In poetry, what is an Octave?

A An eight-line stanza of verse, also the first part of an Italian sonnet.

We had another sequence about food (always a popular topic with children). The poems from *Popcorn and Porcupines* we used were "Half a Million Sausages", "Popcorn", "Yum Yum", "Sister Jill" and "Chew It Up". The last one was a link among the others; we would read a poem then "Chew It Up", then another . . . and so on. There are many, many poems about food in other books, so it is easy to add to your list.



Chew It Up

Chew it up
and down it goes,
down and down
right to your toes.

Poems about clothes can be fun, too, especially if they are rather basic, like this one:

Sandy's Smelly Sneakers

Sandy wears his sneakers
All week long,
That's why his sneakers
Really pong.

Sandy wears his sneakers
Everywhere he goes,
That's why his sneakers are
ON THE NOSE!

It is not difficult to find poems that centre on a particular subject; the linking script adds a certain vitality. For variation and pupil involvement, have the children write the script themselves—and set up the performance; they love the activity and do it well.

PERFORMING WITH ONE POEM

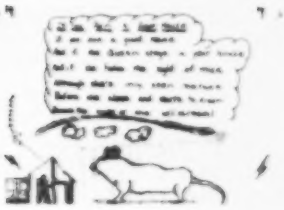
When working with one or two poems in a classroom it is possible to apply the performance approach very effectively. If using "If You Own a Porcupine", the poem should first be read, recited or sung to the class and the children could be asked to add their performance by first saying or singing the poem and then *writing* a poem like it. Barbara and I discovered that, although the form of this poem is quite difficult, the children came up with results which were delightful. We all sang them, too.

If you own a giant mouse
And if the Queen stays in your house
And if she hates the sight of mice
Although she's only seen one twice,
Before she sleeps and starts to dream
Remove the mouse or she will scream.

Poetic trivial pursuit 37

Q. What is an **Ode**?

A. A lyric poem, usually of moderate length, usually expressing exalted praise, typically addressed to a particular subject. e.g. Keats' Ode to a Grecian Urn. Lines may be of various lengths and complex rhythms, suggesting one of the classical forms. (From the Greek *aeidein*, to sing.)



If you own a kangaroo
And Lady Di likes Aussie stew
And if she has a plate of it
And chews the meat up every bit,
Be very sure her plate is clean
Or you will be so very mean.

Care was taken to provide plenty of assistance for the children; they had trouble with the number of feet to a line, the rhyming pattern and the tone of the poem. Their final published version was the result of many a conference, but it was *their* work.

If you own a slimy frog
And ask the Queen to have some grog
And if it somehow disappears
And if she calls for sixteen beers,
Before she does just check and see
At the bottom of the glass there's NO FROGGIE.

With another class we took the poem "Popcorn" and explored its exploding qualities by actually popping some popcorn in the class. Everyone had a taste. We had the children pretend they were grains of corn; they got hotter and hotter and hotter until "*POP!*". Finally the class made a popcorn collage with crumpled paper.

Imagine you are a—

Popcorn

Pop the popcorn
Pop the popcorn
Pop it in the pot.

Pop the popcorn
Pop the popcorn
See the popcorn pop.

Eat the popcorn hot.

Bits of Me

I can slap
with my hand.
I can pat,
I can tip.

I can hop
with my leg.
I can run,
I can skip.

But what
can I do
with my chin
or my hip?

At least
with my lip
I can sip.

As a final example of this technique we took the two poems "Bits of Me" and "Simon's Singlet". First we sang "Bits of Me" (reciting it will do).

Then we discussed *our* "bits" and how important they all are for us to work properly. Next we stretched a volunteer on the floor and traced his outline on a large piece of paper . . . and then we cut the outline into bits . . . and then we stuck the bits together again, to the delight (and relief) of the subject and the children in the class.

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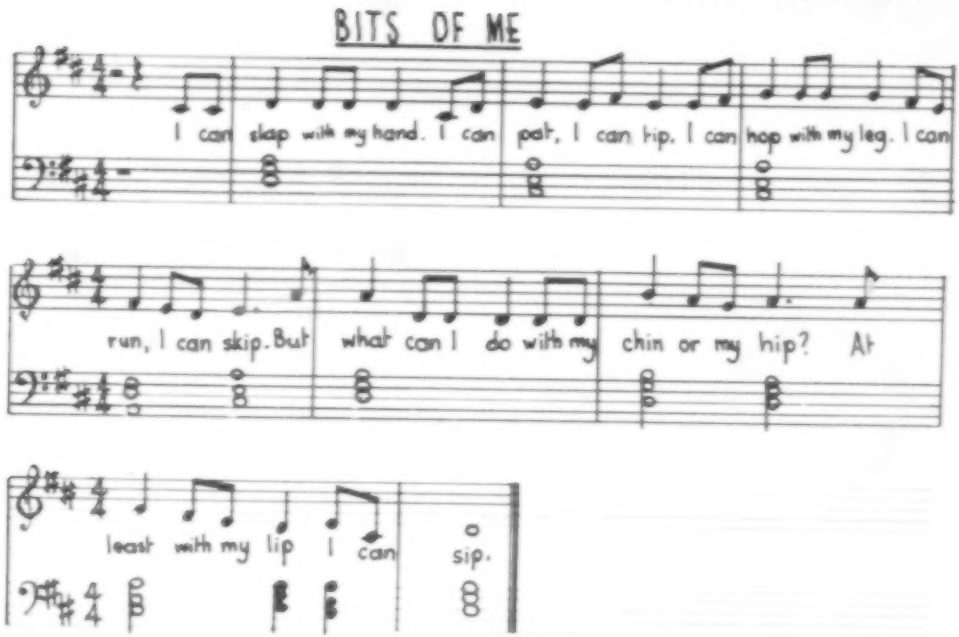
BITS OF ME
I can slap with my hand. I can pat, I can hip. I can hop with my leg. I can
run, I can skip. But what can I do with my chin or my hip? At
least with my lip I can sip.

Following this we talked about how we covered our bits with our favourite items of clothing and I read "Simon's Singlet" to the class. Barbara had a large array of "singlets" cut out of white paper and everyone produced a singlet design which was displayed on a "clothes line".

Simon's Singlet

Simon's special singlet
Had stripes of green and white.
Simon liked his singlet;
He wore it day and night.

When Simon tried to slip it off
To go in for a swim,
He found his special singlet
Had become a part of him.

POETRY AND THE MUSIC OF LANGUAGE

The musical nature of poetry can be explored in performance with great effect.

I. THE SOUNDS IN WORDS THEMSELVES

(a) **Words that sound like what they mean** (often called onomatopoeic words). They make the sounds themselves, e.g. *drip, splop, rumble, burp* in the following verses:

It's Raining

Drip drip drop
Splish splash splop
Dribble dribble
Gurgle gurgle
Slop slop slop

It's raining!
It's raining!

When will it stop?

Half a Million Sausages

A hundred thousand elephants
In the morning mail have come.
Half a million sausages,
Yum, yum, yum.

Ride on all the elephants,
Rumble, dumble, dum.
Eat up all the sausages,
Ump! Burp! Um!

Have the children think of the sound, say the word, think of the sound, say the word, think of . . . etc. Then say the poem, the verse or the line(s).

(b) **Repetition of Beginning Sounds** (Alliteration)
Say them for effect:

*P**op the p**opcorn*
*P**op it in the p**ot*
*See the p**opcorn p**op*

(c) **Rhyme**

*Hippopotam**usses***
*Do not ride in cars or b**uses***

Explore poems for rhymes; emphasise them when the poem is read; make up your own rhymes.

(d) **Repetition of other sounds within words**

Drip drip drop
Splish splash splop
Dribble dribble

Gurgle gurgle
Slop slop slop

Find them; say them; find others; make up some more.

2. THE RHYTHM OF THE LANGUAGE

(a) Some poems are very *regular* in rhythm, e.g. "Bits of Me":

I can **slap**,
with my **hand**
I can **pat**,
I can **tip** . . .

(b) Some rely on *varied* rhythm to gain effect, e.g. "Brother Jim" and "Sandy's Smelly Sneakers":

When
he
stands
side
on
you
can't
see
him

San*dy* **wears** *his* **sneakers**
Every*where* *he* **goes**.
That's why *his* **sneak***ers are*
ON THE NOSE.

Use varied stress (accent) to gain special emphasis; volume can be increased as well.

3. VOLUME, PITCH, SPEED

(a) Volume

Sometimes soft, sometimes loud depending on the nature of the poem; e.g. for "The Man Next Door", increase volume for the last two lines:

The man next door
has the longest nose.
It sounds like a bugle
when it blows.

For "Mouse is One", keep it soft and thoughtful:

Mouse is one
And mice is two,
Or three or four or more.
You must admit
You've never met
A mice before.

(b) Pitch

High or low, depending on situation and the mood, e.g. "Pop the Popcorn"—high pitch, to reflect *excite-*

Viewpoint

Poetry is the highest literary form. If we deny poetry to the child he will sense the loss. In adolescence, many children seek out the non-material, and the most easily available expressions of it—if the child has no other criteria—are to be found in the supernatural, the occult and in oversimplified paraphrases of Eastern mysticism. All of these are, ultimately, a dead end, and the child is left with no way through to spirituality, no way to test his integrity. I am not saying that a childhood steeped in poetry is a safeguard against a morbid adolescence, but I do believe poetry is essential to the human soul, and that a life without access to poetry is a life diminished.

Griselda Greaves
Signal, September 1979

Poetic trivial pursuit 39

Q. What does **Pentameter** mean?
A. A verse line consisting of five metrical feet, common in English verse.

ment; "Mouse is One"—low pitch, to reflect *thoughtfulness*.

(c) Speed
Fast or slow, depending on the situation or mood, e.g. "Yum Yum"—fast, to show *eagerness*; "If You Own a Porcupine"—slow, to show caution.

Many of the expressive qualities of poetry go together: slow, soft and low; fast, loud and high-pitched (although this may vary). Whatever mixture you use with a poem, look for flexible ways of dealing with the verse you have. And *perform* the poem: sometimes sing it, sometimes shout it, sometimes whisper it, sometimes say it to your shoes, sometimes act it out. BUT ALWAYS ENJOY IT.

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SEAN MONAHAN

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Poetry and Performance 2

Children as performers

HOW I LEARNED THE VALUE OF PERFORMANCE

I understand the feelings of students who do not like poetry—for I was one of them. I understand the difficulty some teachers have in teaching poetry—for I once had the same difficulty. I no longer do—and my whole present "theory" of poetry teaching began with attempts to translate into classroom terms the experience that taught me to enjoy poetry. That experience was a performance I attended in 1970 given by four actor/writer/musicians calling themselves "The Barrow Poets". On that memorable afternoon I sat listening to poetry for two hours and, for the first time, really enjoyed it.

Here at last I heard poems brought to life by people who understood the importance of **performance**. They linked poems with **music** and **song**; they experimented with **accents**; where appropriate, they used **mime** and **sound-effects**. How different it was from those solemn poetry readings I attended at university, with the faintly pious atmosphere and poets who were such poor readers that they sapped the life from their own poems.

Viewpoint

The meaning of a poem is not what it would mean if translated into prose but what it means to each reader when he translates it into the terms of his own spiritual experience.

C. Day Lewis
Enjoying Poetry

NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PLEASURE

From that experience I learnt a number of lessons which still inform my poetry teaching. The first was that there is nothing (NOTHING!) more important than **pleasurable experience** of poetry. There is only one requirement for successful "teaching" of poetry—**enjoyment**. No matter how you "teach" poetry or what theories you use to justify that teaching, if your students do not enjoy poetry, the attempt is a failure. Conversely, however wrong a teacher's theories may seem and however reactionary the approach used, if students enjoy their poetry the attempt is a success.

A poetry course without enjoyment is a course without meaning, while a course in which enjoyment is the sole aim will always, in fact, achieve very much more. Firstly, poetry does its own teaching so long as a child responds with pleasure. From poems they enjoy, children learn to understand people and feelings better, learn the subtle ambiguities of myth and symbol and learn the power of words and rhythms. A teacher can do much to deepen and extend such learning—but it all begins with enjoyment of the poem. And because children who enjoy poetry tend to read and hear a lot of it, they are more likely to develop, over the years, sophisticated **tastes** and a lifelong **commitment** to poetry.

EVERY POEM IS A "PERFORMANCE POEM"

The primacy of pleasure was the first lesson I learnt from the Barrow Poets. The second was that, for many people, poetry is more easily approached through the **ear** than the eye: most students I teach certainly prefer **hearing** poetry to reading it. That is why oral performance is so valuable in the "teaching" of poetry, at any level. Some teachers limit oral performance to poetry that is overtly rhythmic and/or dramatic. Certain poems are classed as "performance poems" and dealt with orally, but teachers revert to non-oral approaches for all the rest. The trouble is that "all the rest" includes most of the poems that are truly valuable, most of the poems that are worthy of deep response and study.

I believe that all poetry can be "performance poetry", that every poem benefits from imaginatively conceived, carefully planned, thoroughly practised and well performed oral presentation. Take, for instance, Miroslav Holub's much anthologised poem "The Door" and consider how it might be performed:

Go and open the door
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.
Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
Go and open the door.
At least
there'll be
a draught.

I have seen this poem performedmany times by different groups of children. All had differen ideas. One group chose to reinforce the meaning through **mme**. Another established a mood of mystery with simple **sounl-effects**: a clock ticking, a door creaking, soft wind noises. A third stood in line and harangued the class: begging, cajoing, urging and using a range of **body language** as they dicso. In one group a girl used music, playing a wistful meloy on the recorder as the others read the poem.

There were less successful attempts too. One group tried to read it as a **round** for three voices, only to find the words got lost and the meaning destroyed. Another experimented with whispered **echo-effects** on key wors (*a tree . . . a tree . . . tree*) but found that they destroyed the flow of the rhythm.

The failures were as useful as the successes. From both, children not only learnt about the possibilities and limitations of particular performance techniues but also about the poem, since discussion inevitably entred on the question, "*What is it about the poem that ade this technique successful and that one a failure?*"

Experience in classrooms convices me that, far from diminishing the value of poetry, performance experiments help it speak powerfully to wideaudiences. What those children were doing with "The Doo' was not arbitrary; they were not gimmicks, not sugar for thfaintly distasteful pill of poetry. Each performance was *anttempt to find the best way to express what the poem ment to them* and was the result of much discussion and hardwork.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO E A GIELGUD OR A BURTON!

"But I'm no performer. I hate acting and so do some of the kids I teach. This method is not fous."

I sympathise with such feelingsI too have never liked

Poetic trivial pursuit 41

Q: What is a **Quatrain**?

A: A stanza or poem of four lines, especially one having alternate rhymes

acting: I always avoided auditions for school plays and hate parties where I have to dress up or, worse still, take part in charades. I therefore approached my new-look, post-Barrow poetry teaching with some trepidation. However, I have found that dramatic talent is not essential, since two things make anyone into a good performer: **music** and **multi-voice reading**.

USE BACKGROUND MUSIC

Considering we are so used to the exploitation of background music by film and television, it is surprising so few poetry readers take advantage of it. An appropriate piece of music played softly behind a reading makes even a fairly lacklustre performance sound good. Background music actually helps children lift the quality of their reading—they tend to slow down, responding to the mood the music is establishing.

Sometimes I ask students to choose alternative music for a particular poem. After the class has heard all the versions, we discuss which music suited the poem best and why. As they justify their opinions, students inevitably begin to discuss the *mood* of the poem. At other times I ask students to take any poem they enjoy and find recorded music to suit it. Finding the most appropriate music necessitates *reading* the poem again and again. Each reading helps imprint the poem on the mind; each rejection implies some *judgement* about the poem's mood and meaning.

Once the right music has been found, then comes the practice—more readings, more experience of the poem in pleasurable circumstances.

Finally comes the performance in front of an audience and again the follow-up discussion: "Why did you choose such happy music? I think it is a sad poem!"/"No it's not. Look at what it says in the second verse . . . etc."

As in all such discussion, the *performance* is the focus but it is *the poem itself* they are really discussing.

GET A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS—MULTI-VOICE READING

Music is one important aid in performance; the other is *multi-voice* reading. I use the term to distinguish it clearly from *choral* reading. In choral reading, voices speak in unison; in a multi-voice reading, voices take separate parts and rarely join together for more than a few words. By sharing the task in this way, a group of ordinary readers can achieve a variety of pace, tone, pitch and accent. One line can be given to the extrovert who is good at funny accents, another to the shy, soft-voiced student, a third to a high, quick voice and a fourth to a low, richer voice. The method has the additional advantage of giving weak readers non-threatening practice in oral-reading: since no one reads more than one line at a time,

hesitant readers can participate without stumbling and thus build their confidence. The whole idea, of course, is to divide a poem in ways that bring out its meaning clearly.

As groups work on such scripting exercises, deciding where they should divide a poem and how best to use their voices, they always discuss the *meaning* that the poem has for them. I constantly stress one criterion against which all decisions must be judged—appropriateness. Is this *line division*, that *tone*, this *pace* appropriate to the poem? As they discuss these questions, and as they hear other people's views, they are sharing and deepening their understanding of the poem itself.

PRACTICE DOES MORE THAN MAKE PERFECT

The central strategy of this approach to poetry is the practice of a poem in preparation for public performance. In the earliest stages I run such practice sessions myself, working with the whole class as a music teacher dōes with a choir, going over and over a poem with the class until we have a performance to be proud of. Since I am using thirty or more voices and I want each to play an important part, I necessarily use more unison speaking at this stage than I would use in a smaller group. I also introduce as many other techniques as possible (repetition, echo-effects, sound-effects, accent, singing etc.) in order to give them ideas for their own later experimentation.

In the process, the poem is given the chance to speak its meanings fully to each child. Poetry educates by being experienced. Discussion and analysis are never essential, interesting though they often are. The best way to go deeper and deeper into the poem is not to discuss it more and more, but to **read** it more and more, **hear** it more and more and **speak** it more and more.

A teacher's problem is how to keep children in contact with the poem long enough for it to speak fully to them. The one unfailingly successful way is to let them work on it for a performance. In the process of saying it over and over again, not only do they internalise all the rich ambiguity of its meanings, not only have its rhythms sunk firmly into their memories, but they also unwittingly commit large parts of it to memory, making it their own.

GROUP WORK ACHIEVES SO MUCH

While I work with the whole class in the early stages, it is small group work that is the true centre of the following program sequence:

1. Group **selection** of poems to be performed.
2. Group **discussion** of appropriate performance techniques for each poem.

Viewpoint

Children should be given many opportunities for speaking poetry as soon as they can read it and for learning it by heart from the beginning. Only in these ways will they be able to savour poetry to the full. In a climate of feeling and thought where poetry is taken regularly, where it is well taught, and where what is read satisfies true needs and desires, there is much to be said for "learning by *heart*", which is another way of saying "learning by *love*". Although poetry should not be used merely as a vehicle for developing powers of memory, there are few young children, with their virgin minds and strong feelings, who can long resist the constant encounter with memorable words and haunting rhythms.

Leonard Clark
Children's Literature in Education, Autumn 1978, p. 133

Poetic trivial pursuit 43

(Not so easy!)

Q. What is meant by **Rhyme Royal**?
A. A stanzaic form introduced into English verse by Chaucer, consisting of seven lines of iambic pentameter rhyming a b a b b c c

3. Group **practice** of the poems until a high standard has been achieved.
4. Group **performance** of the poems to other students.
5. Joint **evaluation**—discussion between audience and performers.

In the **selection** stage, group members browse individually through poetry books, finding poems they like and reading them to each other in order to select a short list of poems they all like. What a simple way to encourage wide reading of poetry! How useful also for the teacher, who can learn so much about the children's tastes from the choices they make.

The next two stages solve most of the problems faced by teachers who want students to discuss poetry profitably—which they are often reluctant to do, in the traditional situation. It is hard to discuss something one has not yet had time to experience properly. Stages **two** and **three** of the small group sequence give children time to get to know the poem while they talk about it and practise it over and over again. Furthermore, the friendliness of a small group provides a less threatening setting for the sharing of personal feelings. Discussion always occurs so long as the children are working seriously together: the very nature of the task they are engaged upon demands discussion. How can they possibly read a poem to an audience if they do not sort out together any problems of meaning? How can they decide where and how to *divide* up the poem, or what *tone* to use, unless they discuss together the poem's *purpose* and *mood*?

Stages **two** and **three** lend themselves particularly to the primary school. Young children usually relish this kind of oral experimentation—seeing what they can do with their voices and how they can add to their performance with props, mime and sound effects. Along with all the thinking and the purposeful talk that goes on, they are also having a huge amount of fun which, of course, can do nothing but good for poetry.

Final performance can take many forms, from a single poem performed in front of a small group, right up to a full-scale "concert" done in front of the whole school. Also very useful is the cassette tape-recorder. Groups can be taught how to put a ten or fifteen minute program onto tape and, after the class has had a chance to hear these, the best can be held in the library as a resource for the future. Whatever the nature of the final performance, it is important that there should *be* one. Groups that know there will be a final audience to please tend to work with greater seriousness—just as real publication (e.g. in a magazine) invariably improves the quality of written work.

Here are some discussion starters for the **evaluation** stage:

- Did the taped performances help you to enjoy the poems

Poetic trivial pursuit 44

Q What is **Rhythm** (metre)?

A The feeling of a recurring beat or accent in language. The arrangement of words into a more or less regular sequence of stressed and unstressed or long and short syllables.

more than when you read them silently to yourself? If they did, how and why did they do so?

- How many different techniques did you count altogether and what were they? Which of them had you not thought of using with poetry before?
- Which performances were very effective? What was effective about them?
- What other techniques could have been used? You may have thought of some completely new ones, or you may remember ones you have heard other performers use.

Viewpoint

The study of poetry is a training of the emotions—that is, training for life.

James Reeves

GETTING STARTED

A suggested Activity

Look at Spike Milligan's poem "Soldier Freddy" and at the suggestions for performance that follow it. Try out the suggestions in a group reading. See which of them work well and which do not.

Soldier Freddy
was never ready,
But! Soldier Neddy,
unlike Freddy
Was always ready
and steady.
That's why,
when Soldier Neddy
Is-outside-Buckingham-Palace-on guard-in-the-
pouring-wind-and-rain-
being-steady-and-ready,
Freddy—
is home in beddy.

Spike Milligan

Here are some suggestions for a performance of "Soldier Freddy".

- One person could act Freddy—lounging in a chair, reading, having a drink and a smoke. He could say **line two** in a slow lazy voice with a huge yawn in the middle.
- The whole group could call out **lines one and three** as if they were shouting out for the two soldiers to come. They would not need to say it in unison. It might sound better if the voices were unsynchronised.
- One person could act Neddy. He could be standing up, marching smartly on the spot all through the poem. He could speak **lines four to six** in a loud, crisp, sergeant-major-on-parade bark.
- To make him even more robot-like, Neddy could repeat **lines five and six** three times, in just the same sort of voice, until he gets cut off impatiently in mid-line by whoever says **line seven**.
- **Lines eight to eleven** could be said by a lot of different people, each barking out one word—sounding like a troop

Poetic trivial pursuit 45

Q: What is a **Rondeau**?

A: A French form of poetry which repeats its opening phrase as an unrhymed refrain. It consists of 10 or 13 lines with only two rhymes. (From the Old French *rondel*, a little round.)

Viewpoint

To make of poetry a living voice, a voice that will continue to grow more moving and more revealing when other voices of the classroom and playing field have become faint—this should be the chief object of teaching poetry in schools.

James Reeves
The Poet's World (Heinemann)

of soldiers numbering off. "WHEN!"—"SOLDIER!"—"NEDDY!"—"IS!"—and so on.

- Members of the group could make wind and rain sound effects with their voices while others are reading **lines ten and eleven**.
- **Lines twelve and thirteen** could be sung in a slow, lazy, made-up tune as Freddy finally lies down and ends the poem snoring.

FINALLY

The most I claim for the performance approach is that it seems to develop a teacher's own enjoyment of poetry just as effectively as it does the children's.

For that reason alone it is worth a try.

Try this multi-voice performance:

The Goblin

Group 1:	*A goblin lives in our house*
Groups 1 & 2:	*In our house,*
Groups 1, 2 & 3:	*In our house.*
Whole class:	*A goblin lives in our house all the year round.*
Child 1:	*He bumps*
Child 2:	*And he jumps*
Child 3:	*And he thumps*
Child 4:	*And he stumps.*
Child 5:	*He knocks*
Child 6:	*And he rocks*
Child 7:	*And he rattles the locks.*
Group 1:	*A goblin lives in our house*
Groups 1 & 2:	*In our house*
Groups 1, 2 & 3:	*In our house.*
Whole class:	*A goblin lives in our house all the year round.*

Rose Fyleman

WALTER McVITTY

WALTER McVITTY is Managing Editor of P.E.T.A. publications. Before this he was a Primary School teacher, a school librarian and, for fifteen years, a Senior Lecturer at the Melbourne C.A.E. He is the author of *Innocence and Experience*, essays on contemporary Australian children's writers (Nelson).

Poetry Books

An annotated guide to collection-building

Publishers now offer us a wealth of good quality poetry books attractively presented. The following is a guide to the building of a comprehensive collection of such books. It offers traditional and contemporary verse covering a vast range of poets, styles and subjects and catering for children at all stages of development. Not all titles will necessarily be in print and continuously available; if shops do not have what you are seeking, perhaps a nearby library—or a colleague—does. What is certain is that more poetry is readily available now, and given far superior presentation, than at any time in the history of our civilisation. There's wonderful material at our disposal—all we have to do is put it to use.

(The symbol 🦘 denotes Australian publications.)

NURSERY RHYMES AND TRADITIONAL VERSE

AHLBERG, Janet and Allan. *Each Peach Pear Plum* (Kestrel/Picture Lions).

The rhyming couplet text in this picture book is taken from *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, while each picture

contains a partly hidden object for the young child to pick out. It is thus an ideal book to share with a child "on one's lap". See also the Ahlbergs' *Peepo!*, with real peepholes in the centre of each page.

ALDERSON, Brian. *Cakes and Custard*, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury (Heinemann).

A comprehensive collection of traditional rhymes, richly illustrated.

BLAKE, Quentin. *Quentin Blake's Nursery Rhyme Book* (Cape).

Quentin Blake, an illustrator whose work appeals strongly to most children, presents here 16 unfamiliar rhymes in his usual whimsical style.

BLEVGARD, Lenore. *The Parrot in the Garret* (Julia MacRae), *This Little Pig-a-Wig*, and *Hark! Hark! The Dogs Do Bark* (Hamish Hamilton), all illustrated by Erik Blevgard.

Traditional rhymes with gentle illustrations make these little books specially attractive.

BRIGGS, Raymond. *The Mother Goose Treasury* (Puffin).

This should be the first choice of any parent or teacher of very young children. In large paperback form, it is excellent value for money, with over 400 nursery rhymes and even more illustrations.

LINES, Kathleen. *Lavender's Blue*, illustrated by Harold Jones (Oxford University Press).

This beautifully illustrated and designed collection is now back in print and is highly recommended.

MATTERSON, Elizabeth. *This Little Puffin . . .* (Kestrel/Puffin).

An essential book for parents and teachers of young children, being full of finger plays and singing and action games, of use when working with groups or with individual children. Musical notation and directions are included. This valuable standby, tried and proven over many years, is now available in a hardback edition as well as the original paperback.

O'HARRIS, Pixie. *The Pixie O'Harris Nursery Rhyme Book* (David Ell Press).

The venerable Pixie O'Harris, in her eighties, presents here 30 traditional rhymes illustrated in her own traditional style and in full colour.

OPIE, Iona and Peter. *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* (Oxford University Press).

Illustrated with old woodcuts, this is the standard reference collection, containing over 800 rhymes.

OPIE, Iona and Peter. *The Puffin Book of Nursery Rhymes*, illustrated by Pauline Baynes (Puffin).

An indispensable collection of scholarly authority, with fascinating explanatory notes for particular rhymes.

OUTHWAITE, Ida Rentoul. *Nursery Rhymes* (Angus & Robertson).

Ida Rentoul Outhwaite was an exceptionally popular illustrator in the period after World War 1—first editions of her books are now worth large sums of money. This is a 1984 compilation of various drawings, many being published for the first time, illustrating 32 standard nursery rhymes.

Time for a Rhyme and *Time for a Number Rhyme*, illustrated by various artists (Nelson).

These two Australian productions of traditional rhymes are available in normal trade editions as well as in classroom "big book" format.

WILDSMITH, Brian. *Mother Goose* (Oxford University Press).

A sensationally colourful picture-book presentation of the most familiar rhymes.

SINGLE-POET COLLECTIONS

AGARD, John. *I Din Do Nuttin*, illustrated by Susanna Gretz (Bodley Head).

For younger readers, a collection of simple verses about everyday events by a writer from Guyana.

AHLBERG, Allan. *Please Mrs Butler*, illustrated by Fritz Wegner (Kestrel/Puffin).

Here are some wonderfully perceptive and amusing verses, written by a talented ex-teacher who is now a highly successful author. All these poems are about everyday events in primary schools (head inspections for lice, manipulating the emergency teacher, dogs in the playground), situations which are enjoyable to read about because they are so familiar.

Viewpoint

The more books of poetry there are for children the better, it does not greatly matter that many of the anthologies may contain some poems that few of the children will ever want to know about. The important principles to be followed are that the books do not contain too many poems or extracts, that they be concerned sometimes with a single and significant theme, that the books should be made attractive by well-drawn illustrations and decorations (if they do not hinder enjoyment), that the books be inexpensive to buy, that the collections not be confined to work by dead poets, and that there be a good proportion of serious verse.

Leonard Clark
Children's Literature in Education
Autumn 1978, p. 133

Poetic trivial pursuit 4?

Q. [illegible] Sestet

A. [illegible]

BELLOC, Hilaire. *Selected Cautionary Verses*, illustrated by B.T.B. and Nicolas Bentley (Puffin).

These popular poems, such as "Jim, Who ran away from his Nurse and was eaten by a Lion" and "Matilda, Who told Lies, and was Burned to Death", should be encountered by every child at some stage or other.

CAUSLEY, Charles. *Figgie Hobbin*, illustrated by Pat Marriott (Macmillan/Puffin).

This is an excellent collection from one of the best modern English poets. His work is more recognisably traditional than that of this contemporaries, such as McGough or Rosen, and is less "popular" in style—he is not just out for laughs. His poetry is always rewarding, enlightening and often beautiful.

de la MARE, Walter. *Collected Rhymes and Verses* (Faber).

Walter de la Mare was undoubtedly one of the greatest children's poets ever. Poems such as "Silver", "Someone" and "Five Eyes" have remained as permanent furniture of the mind for anyone brought up on them. His descriptions of the natural world are always sharp and accurate, his observations always felicitous, his sense of wonder at simple things always a continual delight. In separate editions his *Peacock Pie*, illustrated by Edward Ardizzone (Faber), is recommended, as well as *Secret Laughter*, illustrated by Margery Gill (Puffin).

DENNIS, C.J. *A Book for Kids* (Angus & Robertson).

This collection has been through a number of reprints over the years and remains a perennial favourite with children and teachers alike. Few can resist the appeal of the linguistic inventiveness of things like Triantiwontigongolopes and the pounding rhythms of Hey there! Ho there, the circus is in town. A sure winner.

FATCHEN, Max. *Songs for My Dog and Other People* and *Wry Rhymes for Troublesome Times*, illustrated by Michael Atchison (Kestrel/Puffin).

Two books of light-hearted, highly enjoyable verse about everyday events and feelings in the life of a child. The affectionately zany drawings match well the rollicking mood of the verses.

GOWAR, Mick. *Swings and Roundabouts*, illustrated by Alan Curless (Collins).

These are poems about English city life (Greek cafes, laundrettes, demolished houses) seen through the eyes of children. Suitable for 11-year-olds upwards.

HUGHES, Ted. *Moon-Bells and other poems* (Chatto).

Outstanding poetry by the present Poet Laureate. Try also *Nessie the Mannerless Monster*, illustrated by Gerald Rose (Faber), *Season Songs* (Faber), *Meet My Folks*, illustrated by George Adamson (Faber/Puffin) and *The Earth Owl and other Moon People*, illustrated by R.A. Brandt (Faber). Teachers who are unaware of Ted Hughes' work should seek it out. It makes demands but is worth any effort. *Nessie the Mannerless Monster* is an enjoyable way to start.

HOPKINS, Gerard Manley. *Look Up at the Skies!*, illustrated by Yvonne Skargon (Bodley Head).

It would be a lucky child who was introduced to the special beauty of Hopkins' poems ("Pied Beauty", "The Windhover", "Felix Randall") by an adult genuinely in tune with them. This attractive edition makes it easier to do.

LAWRENCE, D.H. *Birds, Beasts and the Third Thing*, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen (Julia MacRae).

This is a sumptuous book, beautifully illustrated and produced, of Lawrence's poetry considered suitable for children.

McGOUGH, Roger. *Sky in the Pie*, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura (Kestrel).

Roger McGough's poetry is just the thing to convert those upper-Primary/lower Secondary children who think they "don't like" poetry.

McGOUGH, Roger and Michael Rosen. *You Tell Me*, illustrated by Sara Midda (Kestrel/Puffin).

Two of the popular new English poets combine in this amusing collection.

MACLEOD, Doug. *In the Garden of Bad Things*, illustrated by Peter Thomson and *The Fed Up Family Album*, illustrated by Jill Brierley (Kestrel/Puffin).

Very popular, amusing light verse, from a very young but talented poet with a flair for rhythm and inventiveness; excellent for reading aloud.

MARTIN, David. *I Rhyme My Time*, illustrated by Robert Ingpen (Jacaranda).

From his output of poetry, written over a 35-year period, David Martin has selected those he considers suitable for children: "poems to grow with—poems that may grow with you". This is real poetry, ranging from elegies to dead cats and homages to dim-sim sellers, to thoughts about race, war, peace and eternity. An idiosyncratic mixture of pathos, humour and humanity.

MILLIGAN, Spike. *Silly Verse for Kids*, illustrated by the author (Puffin).

What child could resist the inspired lunacy and verbal dexterity of Spike Milligan? Once they've discovered this book, they'll be delighted to find there's even *more*—in *A Book of Milliganimals*, and *Unspun Socks from a Chicken's Laundry* (Puffin). A recording of the author reading and singing the poems from the latter book, with musical accompaniments and sound effects, is available from: Chicken's Laundry, P.O. Box 101A, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 5AX, England.

MILNE, A.A. *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six*, illustrated by Ernest Shepard (Methuen).

A must for every collection of poetry for children. The settings and subject matter may seem remote and irrelevant to some, but the sense of fun and the rollicking, rhythmic nature of the verse seems always fresh and irresistible.

NASH, Ogden. *Custard and Company*, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Kestrel/Puffin).

Here are 84 samples of Ogden Nash's famous brand of zany humour and verbal inventiveness.

O'NEILL, Mary. *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*, illustrated by Leonard Weisgard (World's Work).

These poems about colours have been popular with teachers for two decades now; they are commonly used as stimulus models for children's own efforts. (But see Doug MacLeod's comments, too.) Another Mary O'Neill collection is *People I'd Like to Keep* (World's Work).

Poetic trivial pursuit 50

Q: What is a **Spenserian Stanza**?

A: The nine-line stanza used by the poet Spenser in his poem *The Faerie Queene*, consisting of eight lines of iambic pentameter and a concluding Alexandrine, rhyming *a b a b b c b c c*, e.g.

He there does now enjoy eternal rest
And happy ease, which thou dost want and crave,
And further from it daily wanderest:
What if some little pain the passage have,
That makes frail flesh to fear the bitter wave?
Is not short pain well borne, that brings long ease,
And lays the soul to sleep in quiet grave?
Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, death after life does greatly please.

PATERSON, A.B. (Banjo). *The Man from Ironbark* and *A Bush Christening*, illustrated by Quentin Hole; *Mulga Bill's Bicycle*, illustrated by Deborah Niland; *The Man From Snowy River*, illustrated by Annette Macarthur Onslow (Collins).

These favourite bush ballads have been given first class treatment in beautifully illustrated single editions which are part of a series. (See also Henry Lawson's *Andy's Gone With Cattle*, illustrated by John King.)

PATTEN, Brian. *The Sly Cormorant and the Fishes*, illustrated by Errol Le Cain (Kestrel).

Here are a few dozen of Aesop's fables, including the familiar "The Fox and the Stork", "The Hare and the Tortoise" and "The Grasshopper and the Ant", translated into verse.

PLATH, Sylvia. *The Bed Book*, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Faber).

Admirers of Sylvia Plath may be surprised to discover her light-hearted catalogue of desirable beds, ranging from an Elephant Bed for hot weather ("cool as a pool") to a Bounceable Bed which will bounce you "over the moon to Timbuktoo".

A Puffin Quartet of Poets, selected by Eleanor Graham, illustrated by Diana Bloomfield (Puffin).

A beautifully designed book, long a paperback classic, this contains selections from the work of four English poets: Eleanor Farjeon, James Reeves, E.V. Rieu and Ian Serraillier.

REEVES, James. *Complete Poems for Children*, illustrated by Edward Ardizzone (Heinemann).

This contains all the poems from *The Wandering Moon* (1950), *The Blackbird and the Lilac* (1952), *Prefabulous Animiles* (1957), *Ragged Robin* (1961) and *The Story of Jackie Thimble* (1965), which may still be found in some school libraries. Reeves' work is pre-modern formal, presenting no difficulties, always rewarding.

ROLLS, Eric. *Miss Strawberry Verses*, illustrated by Deborah Niland (Kestrel).

The awful "Miss Strawberry" was an invention of the author's own children—all he had to do, he says, was put her weird doings into verse—and very popular they have become. In Miss Strawberry's garden the snapdragons really snap; her goldfish bowl has sharks in it!

ROSEN, Michael. *Mind Your Own Business; Wouldn't You Like to Know?* and *You can't Catch Me!*, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Deutsch/Puffin).

Michael Rosen writes very child-centred verse about the things which preoccupy their thoughts (e.g. handling one's parents, siblings, dogs). These are good to use as performance poetry.

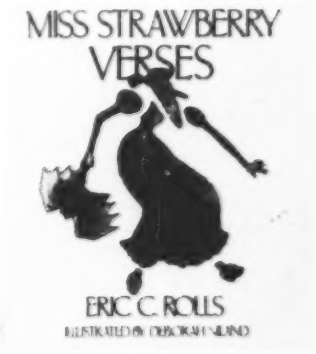
SERRAILLIER, Ian. *The Robin and the Wren*, illustrated by Fritz Wegner (Kestrel).

An enjoyable collection of long and short poems by the well-known teacher/poet (who also wrote the novel *The Silver Sword*). Try also *I'll Tell You a Tale* (Puffin), which contains as well as his own verse (including spells and riddles) a number of traditional ballads adapted by him. It is illustrated variously by artists such as Victor Ambrus and Charles Keeping, as well as photographs.

Viewpoint

Some poetry lovers would be shocked if we told them that they do not really love poetry at all: what they love is the prose meaning they can extract from a poem . . . the truly poetic response is one of pure pleasure.

C. Day Lewis
Enjoying Poetry



Poetic trivial pursuit 51

Q: What is meant by **Spondee**?
A: A metrical foot consisting of two long (stressed) syllables. *DUM-DUM*. (The word comes from the Greek for a ritual libation, due to the use of this particular rhythm in music which accompanied such ceremonies.)

poems and illustrations by
Shel Silverstein

SILVERSTEIN, Shel. *A Light in the Attic*, illustrated by the author (Cape).

More witty verse by the phenomenal American author whose books (*The Giving Tree; Where the Sidewalk Ends*) sell in millions.

STEVENSON, Robert Louis. *A Child's Garden of Verses.*

This famous collection, first published in 1885, is a poet's remembrance of sensations of his own childhood. It led to many poor imitations but also inspired Walter de la Mare to write *Songs of Childhood* (1902). Stevenson's collection seems immortal; there are many editions available. Try the soft pencil drawings of Eve Garnett (Puffin) or the colourful Brian Wildsmith version (Oxford). Eric Blevgard offers a selection in his pen-and-wash edition (Picture Lions).

WINCH, Gordon. *Popcorn and Porcupines*, illustrated by Katrina van Ghent (Hodder and Stoughton).

Thirty simple poems for small children; good for performance.

WRIGHT, Kit. *Rabbiting On*, and *Hot Dog*, illustrated by Posy Simmonds (Kestrel/Puffin).

Satisfying and enjoyable mixtures of serious and comic verse with strong rhythms and interesting subjects.

GENERAL ANTHOLOGIES

BENNETT, Jill. *A Packet of Poems*, illustrated by Paddy Mounter (Oxford University Press).

Over 100 small helpings of mainly modern poems about food (contains extra "rhymoflavin"!).

BENNETT, Jill. *Days Are Where We Live*, illustrated by Maureen Roffey (Bodley Head).

These poems follow a child's day, starting with getting up in the morning, meeting friends and family and progressing through the day to school, playing games and finally to bed. Wes Magee does a similar thing in *All the Day Through* (Evans), as does P.K. Roche in a picture book, *Jump All the Morning* (Viking/Kestrel).

BERG, Leila. *Four Feet and Two*, illustrated by Shirley Burke and Marvin Bileck (Puffin).

These poems are all about living things, and man's part in the natural world.

Poetic trivial pursuit 52

Q: What is a **Stanza**?

A: A fixed number of verse lines arranged in a definite metrical pattern, forming a *unit* (commonly called "a verse") of a poem. (The word comes from the Italian for *halting place or station*.)

BLISHEN, Edward. *Oxford Book of Poetry for Children*, illustrated by Brian Wildsmith (Oxford University Press).

A standard collection, beautifully presented, ideal for Primary School.

BOLD, Alan. *A Scottish Poetry Book*, illustrated by Bob Dewar, Iain McIntosh and Roger McPhail (Oxford University Press).

Most of the poems in this worthwhile collection are unavailable elsewhere. It has some interesting examples of concrete poetry and is suited to Upper Primary and above.

BUTLER, Dorothy. *For Me, Me, Me*, illustrated by Megan Gressor (Hodder and Stoughton).

An ideal book of poems to share with pre-school children.

CAUSLEY, Charles. *The Puffin Book of Magic Verse*, illustrated by Barbara Swiderska (Puffin); *The Puffin Book of Salt-Sea Verse*, illustrated by Antony Maitland (Puffin); *The Sun, Dancing* (Christian Verse), illustrated by Charles Keeping (Kestrel); *Dawn and Dusk*, illustrated by Gerald Wilkinson (Hodder).

These are outstanding anthologies containing first-class material selected with knowledge and flair, beautifully arranged and illustrated.

CORRIN, Sara and Stephen. *Once Upon a Rhyme*, illustrated by Jill Bennett (Faber).

Sub-titled *101 Poems for Young Children*, this is a good collection for use in Primary Schools; good, clear type, profusely illustrated, much of it in full colour.

de la MARE, Walter. *Come Hither*, illustrated by Diana Bloomfield (Kestrel/Puffin).

A first-rate standard collection in two volumes, available in slip-case.

DUGAN, Michael. *The Moving Skull and Other Awesome Australian Verse*, illustrated by Bruce Riddell (Hodder and Stoughton).

Hugh McCrae and Douglas Stewart rub shoulders with young moderns in this collection of spooky verse.

FACTOR, June. *A First Australian Poetry Book*, illustrated by various artists (Oxford University Press).

As with *A Second Australian Poetry Book*, this popular collection includes work by contemporary poets such as Colin Thiele, Max Fatchen and Doug MacLeod and also the old favourites, such as Henry Lawson, C.J. Dennis and Mary

Viewpoint

An anthology of poetry for children should be chosen, like other anthologies, with a high respect for its audience, and should contain nothing that is not the best of its kind. If the second-rate or the fake are let in, it will discourage the natural love that children have for poetry, and the discouragement may last a lifetime. Every poem in the anthology should be of such quality that the experienced lover of poetry will find pleasure in it when he has long since left childhood behind.

Edwin Muir
Scottish poet and critic
New York Times Book Review
13 Nov. 1955

Poetic trivial pursuit 53

Q: What is **Terza Rima**?

A: From the Italian: *third rhyme*: this is a three-line (tercet) continuing stanza form, with rhymes running *aba bcb cdc ded* and so on. Note that the middle line of one tercet rhymes with the first and third lines of the next.

Viewpoint

If, as is common, the work is organised on a thematic basis, the role of poetry is particularly precarious, for we tend to forget that a poem, like a story, is a totality to be enjoyed for itself, and not a fragment of evidence to support some larger theme. This is not to say that our choice of poetry will not be influenced by the themes or projects we devise just as it will be by the spaces and time-slots within which we work, but all these matters are essentially externals, parts of the context for the dialogue that forms the second and principal aspect of the teacher's praxis. As soon as we start twisting that dialogue to meet other needs than those emanating directly from the poem, the spirit of poetry flies out of the window. This is why—however we organise and administer our English work—we need a 'hidden curriculum' to be implicit not in the themes we choose but in our methodology.

Michael Benton
Children's Literature in Education
Autumn 1978

Gilmore. These books are decidedly modern and unthreatening in appearance.

FISHER, Robert. *Amazing Monsters*, illustrated by Rowena Allen (Faber).

Here are verses "to thrill and chill", about all manner of strange beings. Poems by Spike Milligan, Ted Hughes, Michael Rosen and others introduce the reader to Snitterjipes, Ugstabuggles, Centaurs—and Bunyips too, in a poem by Douglas Stewart.

FOSTER, John. *A First Poetry Book*, illustrated by various artists (Oxford University Press).

There are also *Second, Third* and *Fourth Poetry Books* in this attractively produced series. Some material appears here for the first time in print, alongside better known work of such poets as Charles Causley, Wes Magee, Shel Silverstein, Spike Milligan etc.

GRAHAM, Eleanor. *A Puffin Book of Verse*, illustrated by Claudia Freedman (Puffin).

As it first appeared in 1953, this volume, for long a standard work, may look somewhat dull and dated by now but it is still a good source of traditional verse.

GREAVES, Griselda. *The Burning Thorn* (Hamish Hamilton).

This superb collection, a strongly personal choice, has been long out of print but, if it can be located, is excellent for use in Secondary Schools.

HARRISON, Michael and **Christopher Stuart-Clark.** *The Oxford Book of Christmas Poems* (Oxford University Press).

This is an exceptionally attractive "gift book" edition, with a wealth of illustration, much of it in colour, by a varied bunch of artists.

HEANEY, Seamus and **Ted Hughes.** *The Rattle Bag* (Faber).

This huge eclectic collection, published in 1982, has become *the* standard one to use in Secondary Schools, simply because it has almost everything anyone could wish for. It goes against the standard practice of arranging poems in thematic groups—these are all arranged in alphabetical order of first lines or titles. This throws all sorts of poems, from different periods and places, all in together—with refreshing results.

HEYLEN, Jill and **Celia Jellett.** *Someone is Flying Balloons*, illustrated by Kerry Argent (Omnibus).

Ninety Australian poems, old and new, for young and old, are presented in this most attractive publication.

Poetic trivial pursuit 54

Q: What is meant by Tetrameter?
A: A line of verse consisting of four metrical feet; also a verse composed of such lines.

IRESON, Barbara. *The Faber Book of Nursery Verse*, illustrated by George Adamson (Faber).

The title of this valuable collection is misleading, for the book contains a wealth of poetry of use throughout the Primary School.

IRESON, Barbara. *Poet's Corner*, illustrated by Elizabeth Corsellis (Nelson).

If you can find a copy of this anthology you are sure to enjoy its contents and presentation; ideal for Primary grades.

IRESON, Barbara. *The Young Puffin Book of Verse*, illustrated by Gioia Fiammenghi (Puffin).

This is a useful source of appealing poems to share with Primary School children.

JACKSON, David. *The Way to the Zoo* (Oxford University Press).

A collection of poems about animals of all kinds.

JONES, Gwenyth. *These Islands*, illustrated by Mary Ann Hurley (Puffin).

A very fine collection of New Zealand verse suitable for children; very attractive presentation.

McGOUGH, Roger. *Strictly Private*, illustrated by Graham Dean (Kestrel/Puffin).

Totally unthreatening and enjoyable modern verse, ideal for performance.

NICOLL, Helen. *Poems for 7 year-olds and under*, illustrated by Michael Foreman (Kestrel/Puffin).

This inexpensive book makes a good introduction to real poetry for very young children, although it would appeal to children throughout Primary grades. The very large, clear type is exceptionally pleasing.

OPIE, Iona and Peter. *The Oxford Book of Children's Verse* (Oxford University Press).

This book is intended as a scholarly reference source for adults, but its material is, of course, of interest to children. It is a representative collection of verse, with annotations. A standard work, essential for all libraries.

OUTHWAITE, Ida Rentoul. *The Road to Fairyland* (Angus & Robertson).

There's a lot of traditional poetry in this book, with the bonus of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite's magical artwork, made generally available for the first time in this 1982 edition. The originals

Poetic trivial pursuit 55

Q. What is a **Tribrach**?

A. A metrical foot of three short (unstressed) syllables: *de-de-de*.

appeared in two separate limited-edition books, *Elves and Fairies* (1916) and *Fairyland* (1926).

PATTEN, Brian. *Gangsters, Ghosts and Dragonflies*, illustrated by Terry Oakes (Piccolo).

A lively collection of narrative verse by contemporary poets, it aims to bridge the gap between poetry for children and poetry for adults.

READ, Herbert. *This Way Delight*, illustrated by Charles Stewart (Faber Fanfare).

A top-quality selection, arranged under useful headings (e.g. *Charms, Escapes* etc.).

SAXBY, Joyce. *Chosen for Children*, illustrated by Astra Lacis (Angus and Robertson).

First published in 1965, this engaging collection of Australian poems remains one of the best of its kind ever produced.

SCOTT-MITCHELL, Clare. *When a Goose Meets a Moose*, illustrated by Louise Hogan (Methuen).

This international selection of verse for the very young has proved to be very popular since its appearance in 1980. The collection is intended for young children. A companion title *Apples from Hurricane Street* caters for older children. Large format design, layout and illustration add to the appeal.

SUMMERFIELD, Geoffrey. *Junior Voices, Books I-IV* (Penguin).

These books were startlingly modern when they first appeared in 1970 and played a part in giving poetry a fresh new image. Trend-setters in their day, they are still among the most commercially attractive books of their kind.

THOMPSON, Brian. *Lollipops*, illustrated by various artists (Longman/Kestrel).

The four books originally published as part of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* project are available as paperbacks (*Birds, Animals, People* and *Weather*) or this single-volume hardback. Recommended for beginners.

Poetic trivial pursuit 56 _____

Q: What is a Trimeter?

A: A verse line consisting of three metrical feet.

_____

UNTERMEYER, Louis. *The Golden Treasury of Poetry*, illustrated by Joan Walsh Anglund (Collins).

This truly is a golden treasury, an excellent collection, generously full, beautifully presented—one of the very best.

Poetic trivial pursuit 57 _____

Q: What is a Triolet?

A: A complicated French form of eight lines, having the first line repeated as the fourth and seventh and the second line as the eighth, rhyming abaaabab.

_____

WATERS, Fiona. *Out of the Blue*, illustrated by Veroni (Fontana Lions).

Poems about seasons, clouds, rain, snow, wind, storms etc.

WATSON, Julia. *The Puffin Book of Funny Verse* (Puffin).
This originally appeared as *The Children's Book of Funny Verse* (Faber). It is marred only by the crudeness of its illustrations. Try also the same compiler's *A Children's Zoo* (Fontana Lions) and *The Armada Book of Young Verse*, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Lions).

WEBB, Kaye. *I Like This Poem*, illustrated by Antony Maitland (Kestrel/Puffin).
The editor compiled this collection from 1000 recommendations made by children themselves—along with the children's reasons for each choice. The collection is a good one, if surprisingly conservative, sticking as it does to the tried and true (there may be an element of children having given adults what they suspect adults *want* to hear).

WILLARD, Barbara. *Field and Forest*, illustrated by Faith Jacques (Kestrel).
Poetry and prose are mixed in this celebration of the outdoors. Best suited to informal, casual use in Secondary Schools—for those lucky enough to encounter this beautiful book.

WOOLGER, David. *The Magic Tree*, illustrated by various artists (Oxford University Press).
Sub-titled *Poems of fantasy and mystery*, this is a collection of poems about witches, mermaids, ghosts, fairies, transformations and other strange happenings. For Upper Primary and beyond.

Viewpoint

A poem is not an object fixed in space and time with a single immutable meaning. It is a living organism which we can study, match with our own experience of life, and of which we may make something new every day. Properly examined, a good poem, however simple-seeming it may appear on the surface, never stops giving up fresh and exciting secrets.
Charles Causley

Poetic trivial pursuit 58

Q. What is a **Triolet**?
A. A three-line stanza or a three-line poem.

Poetic trivial pursuit 59

Q. What is meant by **Trochee**?
A. A metrical foot of two syllables, the first long and the second short in falling rhythm: *DUM de*. It is thus the reverse of iamb. (Its Greek origin means, literally, a running foot.) The metre of Queen and Huntress chaste and fair is trochaic, the line consisting of three trochees followed by a monosyllable.

Poetic trivial pursuit 60

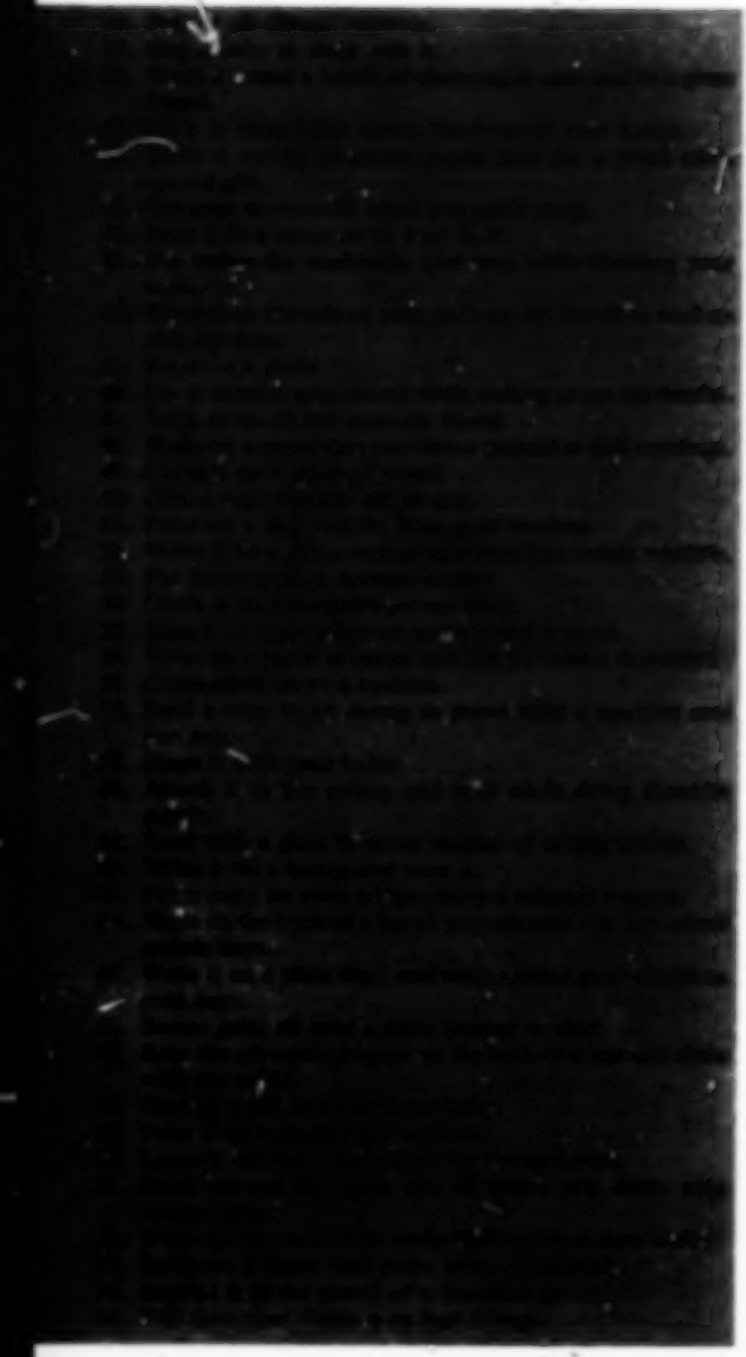
Q. What is a **Villanelle**?
A. An elaborate verse form of French origin, consisting of 19 lines arranged in five tercets and a quatrain. It repeats two lines A and **A** in an intricate form:
A¹ **A**² A¹ **A**² A¹ **A**² A¹ **A**² A¹ **A**²

PAT EDWARDS

75 things to do with a favourite poem*

* Just for fun! Do only one of these and your life will become immediately more adventurous.

1. Write it in Birthday and Get-well cards.
2. Start each day better by reading it instead of the newspaper.
3. Carry it around in purse or wallet.
4. Memorise and recite when stuck at traffic lights.
5. Screenprint on to a T-shirt.
6. Give a copy to your mother on Mothers Day.
7. Hand to any passing stranger.
8. Set it to music and sing at a party.
9. Tattoo it on your back.
10. Turn it into a bumper sticker.
11. Put it under your pillow and "sleep on it".
12. Bake it in a pie and serve to erudite friends.
13. Use a stick to write it in the sand at the beach.
14. Blow up a balloon and write it on the surface.
15. Pin to neighbourhood notice boards (e.g. in supermarket).
16. Hire a sky-writer and get it spread across the sky.
17. Recite it to your greengrocer over the pumpkins and peppers.
18. Declaim under the shower.
19. Write it on your desk blotter.
20. Leave a copy with the postie's Christmas tip.
21. Record on your answer-phone tape.
22. Take on a picnic along with the hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches.
23. Turn it into a jigsaw.
24. Write it on the back of all your cheques.
25. Read to a sympathetic mate over a glass of wine.
26. Use it to practise your handwriting.
27. Put it in a bottle and throw out to sea.
28. Embroider on a pin cushion.
29. Recite to friends at your birthday party.
30. Give to your doctor to help bring down her/his blood pressure.
31. Hand out copies instead of voting slips next election day.
32. Write it at the bottom or around the edges of letters.
33. Teach it to a parrot.
34. Write it on a kite and fly from a windy headland.
35. Stuff copies in letter boxes.



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